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General Assembly

Sixty-sixth session

Official Records

26th plenary meeting
Monday, 26 September 2011, 3 p.m.
New York

President: Mr. Al-Nasser ..... (Qatar)

In the absence of the President, Ms. Kamara (Liberia), Vice-President, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 3.10 p.m.

Agenda item 8 (*continued*)

General debate

The Acting President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Elyor Ganiev, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Uzbekistan.

Mr. Ganiev (Uzbekistan) (*spoke in Russian*): Allow me at the outset to extend my greetings to all those who are participating in the work of the General Assembly at its sixty-sixth session and to wish them every success in their endeavours. It gives me great pleasure to congratulate the Secretary-General, His Excellency Mr. Ban Ki-moon, on his reappointment to that high post for a second term. I also wish to congratulate Mr. Nassir Abdulaziz Al-Nasser on his election to the post of President of the General Assembly at the sixty-sixth session, and wish him fruitful work.

In 2011, Uzbekistan has been celebrating a landmark date in its modern history — the twentieth anniversary of independence. Only 20 years have passed since the Republic of Uzbekistan became an independent State and joined the ranks of the fully fledged Members of the United Nations, having gained the right to decide and build on its own present and future, but over that period Uzbekistan has made significant progress in building an independent State, developing the national economy and modernizing the country.

During those years, the Republic of Uzbekistan has transformed itself from a sluggish raw materials-based economy, with a destructive monoculture of cotton, an underdeveloped industrial and social infrastructure and low-per-capita consumption, into a modern country with a steadily developing economy.

The following evidence clearly testifies to the fact that, over the past 20 years of independent development, Uzbekistan's economy has grown by a factor of 3.5 and the population's total income has increased by a factor of 20. Despite the negative impact of the ongoing global financial and economic crisis, Uzbekistan continues to develop at a steady pace. Over the past five years, the growth in gross domestic product (GDP) has averaged 8.5 per cent. This year, it is expected that that level will be maintained.

Striking achievements have been made in implementing the goals set out in the Millennium Declaration. During the years of independence, State expenditure in the social sector has increased more than fivefold. About 60 per cent of the annual budget is devoted to the development of health care, education, communal services, social welfare and other sectors. Some 82.5 per cent of the population has access to clean drinking water and 83.5 per cent to natural gas.

I would like to underscore in particular the huge role and significance in all those changes of education

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and people's increasing awareness. Annual expenditure on education in Uzbekistan amounts to 10 to 12 per cent of GDP, whereas that indicator worldwide does not exceed 3 to 5 per cent. An exceptional national programme to train skilled personnel and workers has been launched. From 2009, a mandatory 12-year education programme was introduced. Uzbekistan has set up more than 1,600 modern vocational colleges and high schools.

Such indicators, which are not often seen across the world, clearly affirm that our most important goal is ensure the quality of life and protect the interests of citizens. The Uzbek model for the country's democratization and transition to a socially oriented market economy, adopted in the early years of our independence, has served as the basis for those achievements.

Our country is steadily progressing towards achieving the goal we have set ourselves, namely, to join the ranks of the modern, developed and democratic States and to ensure for its people a high standard of living and a dignified place in the world community.

Today, we have every reason to affirm that we have achieved the main goal, that is, the country's irreversible and steady reform and democratization. The conceptual framework for further deepening the democratic reforms and establishing civil society in the country, developed by the President of Uzbekistan, Islam Karimov, in November 2010, provides for the further development and strengthening of Uzbekistan's long-term sustainable development model. The conceptual framework calls for further democratization of State authority and governance, reforming the judicial system, establishing and developing civil society institutions, ensuring freedom of speech and information, developing the electoral law, further deepening market reform and liberalizing the economy.

In assessing the state of affairs in Central Asia, it is important to note that, given its geopolitical and geostrategic significance and the very rich natural resources, the region continues to be the focus of the international community's attention in the context of the growing threats and challenges to security and stability in the world.

First, the war that has been under way in Afghanistan for more than 30 years continues to be the main destabilizing factor, not only in the region but also in the entire world. More unfortunately, the situation remains tense despite all the measures now being taken by the international community. It is important to underscore, in particular, that today, everyone is sure that there is no military solution to the Afghan problem. Almost all leaders, including those involved in resolving the Afghan issue and the direct military command of the coalition forces in Afghanistan, are of this view.

We firmly believe that the Afghan people themselves must resolve their country's problems. Only through a compromise between the warring parties with the Afghans themselves being involved in that process, as well as the socio-economic recovery of Afghanistan with the help of the international community, will it be possible to find a way out of the current deadlock in Afghanistan's situation.

President Karimov already stated that at the NATO Summit in Bucharest in April 2008. We see the future of Afghanistan as a peaceful and steadily developing State that poses no threat to neighbouring countries, such that the people living in the region can fully enjoy the benefits of friendly, mutually beneficial and equal relations. Uzbekistan will continue to pursue a policy of good-neighbourliness and cooperation towards Afghanistan on a bilateral basis, in accordance with mutual national interests.

Secondly, the tragic events in Kyrgyzstan in June 2010 posed a serious challenge to peace and stability in the Central Asian region. More than a year has passed since those bloody events. However, to date no political or legal conclusions on all those forces and specific individuals who ordered, organized and perpetrated the crimes have been drawn. Until such investigations are completed and the perpetrators, irrespective of their nationality, origin or position, are punished, it is difficult to envisage the restoration of trust and cooperation between the Uzbek community and the Kyrgyz.

Thirdly, the socio-economic development not only of our country, but also of the entire Central Asian region, is hampered by the ecological catastrophe of the Aral Sea. In practically the span of one generation, it has changed from once being one of the most exceptional and most beautiful seas into a drying and disappearing pool. Today, the Aral Sea basin faces a range of ecological, socio-economic and demographic problems of global consequences. The Secretary-

General, Mr. Ban Ki-moon, himself was convinced of that while visiting the Aral Sea last year.

In such circumstances, attempts to build huge hydropower facilities on the upper reaches of the Amu Darya and Syr Darya rivers are counterproductive and dangerous, since they pose serious threats to public safety in terms both of environmental, social and technical risks and of preserving the volume and course of the river flow.

In addressing such problems, we proceed on the premise that any use of transboundary watercourses must take into account the interests of all States located in their basins, and should be carried out in accordance with international law. I refer in particular to the Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes of 17 March 1992 and the Convention on the Law of the Non-navigational Uses of International Watercourses of 21 May 1997.

We do not ignore the rights of the upstream countries to develop their hydropower sector. In our view, this is a very important sector of the economy. However, it would be safer and more rational to build cascades of small hydropower plants with the same total production capacity. Our country's position is not only fully consistent with relevant international law and accepted regulations, but it is also, and most importantly, derived from them.

In conclusion, Uzbekistan supports the theme proposed by the President of the General Assembly for this session's general debate, namely, "The role of mediation in the settlement of disputes by peaceful means". We fully share his view regarding the importance of strengthening multilateral machinery so as to ensure a stable and just world order that is capable of effectively responding to emerging threats to regional stability and international security.

The Acting President: I now call on His Excellency Mr. Össur Skarphéðinsson, Minister for Foreign Affairs and External Trade of the Republic of Iceland.

Mr. Skarphéðinsson (Iceland): Let me start by congratulating His Excellency Ambassador Nassir Abdulaziz Al-Nasser on his election as President of the sixty-sixth session of the General Assembly, and assuring him that he will have the fullest cooperation of the Icelandic delegation.

In recent weeks, we have witnessed the worst hunger crisis of this century in the Horn of Africa. It is a devastating reminder that fighting poverty and hunger is still the most important and challenging undertaking of our times. Our collective duty and responsibility is to help our weakest brothers and sisters. As wealthier nations, we must do better in providing relief. We must act with more speed and more generosity to help those who are deprived of the basic necessities of life — food and water. I can say, my friends, that in Iceland, we have indeed decided to do so.

I am quite happy to be able to tell the Assembly today that the Icelandic Parliament has unanimously agreed to substantially increase our contribution to developing nations in the coming financial year. It has also accepted a plan to raise our aid to the goal of 0.7 per cent of our gross national income. That is our pledge, as agreed by every political party in the Icelandic Parliament.

The fight against hunger and poverty is the same struggle as the one we wage to protect our planet from the ravages caused by the greed of our own species. All Members know that, next year, we will celebrate the twentieth anniversary of the bright new vision introduced at the historic Earth Summit in Rio. Over these past 20 years, deep concern for the environment has indeed moved to the forefront of the global agenda. But the Assembly also knows the sobering truth, which is that the ambitions of Rio are still a far cry from being realized. Actions are still needed. If ever there was a time to act boldly, that time is now.

The key theme of Rio next year will be the "green economy". I assure the Assembly that my country has expertise to offer that can help to fuel a green revolution. Renewable energy, marine health, the sustainable use of land and, not least, gender equality, which have always been at the core of the Icelandic foreign policy, are the four issues that we shall bring to Rio next year. What we really need is indeed a revolution, a green revolution. We need a seismic shift from fossil fuels to renewable energy. That is the only way to turn the ship.

In Iceland, we have some cutting-edge technology on geothermal energy that we want to share. That splendid form of renewable energy is the most undervalued and overlooked source of cheap power in the world. Of course, geothermal is most

certainly not a silver bullet, but it needs to be a part of the portfolio that we must develop to solve emissions problems. Many members know that Central and South America, East Africa and South-East Asia are home to vast areas literally brimming with geothermal potential. Icelandic know-how, coupled with outside financing, could go a long way in making those areas self-sufficient in terms of green energy.

As one of the largest fishing nations, Iceland has always been deeply protective of the health of the oceans. Today, climate change threatens to place the fisheries of the world under a new strain. As we speak, the acidification of the oceans resulting from human carbon emissions is affecting the health of the marine environment. This is especially true in the Arctic and its vicinity, which is my home. As a marine biologist, I fear that, more likely sooner than later, this may affect the world's fishing stocks, which are a vital source of protein for more than 1 billion people. This is just one more argument why we so urgently need to conclude a post-Kyoto agreement later this year on the reduction of greenhouse gases.

Every day, the Arctic bears silent witness to the impact of climate change. The snow that I experienced as a child is today fast becoming a rare event for my two teenage daughters. The sad truth is that the Arctic glaciers and the Arctic sea ice are melting at a much faster rate than anyone ever anticipated. It is of course true that the disappearance of the sea ice will open up new and shorter transport routes from the Pacific to the North Atlantic via the Arctic Ocean. We most certainly will also see huge areas open up for the exploitation of oil and gas resources.

This will come at a price, however. Climatic changes are forcing the peoples of the Arctic, such as our neighbours in Greenland, to change their living habits. These changes will also melt the tundra, which acts as a carbon buffer against the climate system, and thus further accelerate the warming of the planet. The already-fragile ecosystem of the Arctic will become even more brittle.

Let us remember what happened in the Gulf of Mexico and let us be aware that oil breaks down very, very slowly in the extreme cold of the Arctic. We should not allow the exploitation of the Arctic without applying the strictest rules. That must be the precondition for every human move into Arctic resources.

I am often asked whether a country like Iceland, which is not geographically small but has, admittedly, slightly fewer people than most, can have any say in action on issues of global concern, be it in Rio or in New York. Well, to lift a phrase from a famous statesman who spoke from this very podium a few days ago: "Yes, we can".

Twenty years ago, in 1991, we in Iceland watched a television broadcast of thousands of brave Latvians, Lithuanians and Estonians taking their destiny into their own hands. They reached out to the international community, among them the people of Iceland, and asked for help in breaking the ice that was impeding their international recognition.

The great British statesman, Lord Palmerston, once made a famous statement to the effect that there is no such thing as eternal friendship between nations and that only eternal interests could determine how nations reacted towards each other. That well-known mantra is still taught today in every bad school of political science. My friends, if Palmerston's words had prevailed, Iceland would have turned a deaf ear to the call of the freedom fighters in the Baltics. We did not. In the historic year of 1991, Iceland became the first to recognize the restored sovereignty of the Baltic States. We did that out of respect for the principles that are so vitally important to small nations: the right to choose your own destiny, to carve out your own future — the undeniable right of small nations to be independent. Principles do matter in politics.

Based on the same principle that led Iceland to recognize the Baltic States in 1991, today we support the Palestinian struggle for statehood. Based on that very same principle, Iceland feels that the international community should welcome Palestine as a new Member State in the United Nations, based on the pre-1967 borders — exactly the same criteria as those laid down by the European Union, the Quartet and lately, also by President Barack Obama in his strong speech in May.

I have been to Gaza. I have talked to the people: the fishermen who no longer can ply their trade, the young people who are unemployed, the families that need a roof over their head. I have also been to the West Bank. I have seen with my own eyes how the land of the Palestinians has literally been cut to pieces by horrible walls of separation. That is wrong. That is

unjust. That is against every moral code that Iceland has ever stood for as a guardian of human rights.

We must remember that Palestine today is really doing just the same thing as Israel did in 1947, and Iceland and so many other States at the time supported Israel's action. Israel took its case to the United Nations and emerged with statehood. Palestine deserves the same. And I think it is hypocrisy to suggest otherwise. In the middle of the democratic revolution brought on by the fresh breeze of the Arabic Spring and inspired, not least, by women and young people, it would be foolish to deny Palestine its right to statehood. Such denial would act against reconciliation in the region.

It will, perhaps, not come as any surprise to Members here, but Iceland will therefore vote "yes", when a resolution on Palestinian statehood comes to a vote in the General Assembly. Furthermore, the Icelandic Government is determined to fully recognize Palestine and will next week submit to the Parliament of Iceland a resolution on the recognition of Palestine as a sovereign and independent State.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Mourad Medelci, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the People's Democratic Republic of Algeria.

Mr. Medelci (Algeria) (*spoke in Arabic*): His Excellency Mr. Abdelaziz Bouteflika, President of the People's Democratic Republic of Algeria, has given me the honour of delivering this address to the General Assembly. At the outset, I wish to congratulate the President of the General Assembly for his assumption of the presidency at its sixty-sixth session. His professional experience in the United Nations and his personal qualities will undoubtedly lead to the excellent conduct and success of our work.

I also pay tribute to his predecessor, Mr. Joseph Deiss, for his efforts. Finally, I reiterate my congratulations to Mr. Ban Ki-moon, Secretary-General, upon his reappointment and express my country's satisfaction for the dynamic manner by which he is leading the work and role of the Organization.

Now that the Republic of South Sudan has joined the family of the United Nations, on behalf of my country, I warmly congratulate the people and the Government of that kindred country.

The main theme of this session, namely, the role of mediation in the settlement of disputes by peaceful means, was chosen at a time of aggravated tensions, the recurrence of economic and financial crises, increasing unresolved challenges and diminished efforts and cooperation in multilateralism.

Today's globalized but confused world has strayed from its social structures and balances and been crisscrossed by new, unregulated influences and unequal relationships. Therefore, the international system that was established in 1945 requires today adaptation to current demands in order to respond to the expectations of the people of the world.

Algeria is following with special interest the ongoing events in some countries in its region, which have led to numerous lives lost and huge material damage. Algeria deplores the violence experienced in some countries, and reiterates its call for a political settlement of all of those ongoing situations, based on the aspirations of the people for freedom, justice and democracy, and respect for each country's sovereignty and for international law.

With respect to Libya, Algeria expects a rapid restoration of peace and security and the formation of a Government that represents all sections of Libyan society. We are convinced that Libya's stability is a fundamental element for the stability of the region as a whole. From this podium, Algeria reaffirms its determination to work immediately with the new Libyan authorities to promote full, exemplary bilateral collaboration based on a spirit of brotherhood and solidarity.

Recent developments on the Arab stage will not fail to directly affect the situation prevailing in the Middle East. Continued Israeli occupation of Palestine and other occupied Arab territories, as well as the lack of genuine prospects for just and lasting peace in the region are, in that regard, a source of deep concern for Algeria. The stalemated peace process in the Middle East, the continued building of settlements and the continued campaign to Judaize the holy city of Al-Quds continue daily to further distance any prospect of a just and lasting peace based on the principle of land for peace.

That situation, which weighs heavy with risk and uncertainty in an already sensitive region, is both an affront to the peoples of the region and a challenge for the entire international community. Among those

challenges, the inhumane embargo of Gaza and its seacoast constitutes a genuine collective punishment of its inhabitants.

The Palestinian Authority's initiative, at this session, requesting that Palestine be recognized as a full Member State of the United Nations is an opportunity for the United Nations to correct, to some extent, an injustice that has lasted for over 60 years now. This admission will be a clear, unequivocal response by the international community showing its determination to impose international law and to reject a policy of fait accompli.

In the same context, Algeria reiterates its concern at the persistence of coercive economic measures and unilateral sanctions against developing countries. I would recall in this respect the embargo that has been imposed against Cuba for over half a century now.

There is another issue on the agenda of the United Nations that calls for special attention, namely, the situation in the Western Sahara. Indeed, no effort must be spared in promoting the path of dialogue and negotiation, which is the only way that will enable the Saharawi people to freely express their right to self-determination. In this context, Algeria reiterates its commitment to provide full support to the efforts of the Secretary-General and his Personal Envoy, and appeals to both parties, Morocco and the Frente Polisario, to demonstrate a spirit of responsibility in settling this conflict, which has unfortunately lasted all too long.

This year marks the tenth anniversary of the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001. The time has come for the international community to reiterate its full commitment to the fight against international terrorism. The progress made to date to eradicate this scourge does not yet satisfy us, nor does it allow us to let down our guard. On the contrary, we should remain ready to contribute appropriate solutions to the root causes of terrorism and its many ramifications.

Algeria would thus take this opportunity to stress the threefold need to, first, reach the necessary consensus to hasten the adoption of an international convention against terrorism; secondly, adopt a protocol prohibiting the paying of ransoms to terrorist groups; and finally, prevent the use of information and communications technologies for criminal purposes.

In order for this approach to succeed, we must ensure a return to strict respect for the fundamentals of our cooperation, the preservation of the universal character of our Organization, the primacy of international law and the full application of the rules of multilateralism.

The current weaknesses of world governance are illustrated on a daily basis in the various crises that we face. In this respect, I would refer first to the inability of the United Nations in general, and the Security Council in particular, to manage conflicts that threaten international peace and security or even to ensure the implementation of their own resolutions. Secondly, I would refer to the recent global economic and financial crisis and its devastating effects, in particular its impact on developing countries' economies. This crisis has exposed a system subject to the vagaries of the market, which responds more to the need for large private companies to make a profit than to the need for growth and development. This system excludes the countries of the South from both the management of relevant international institutions and from setting the rules that govern them. Thirdly, I would mention the tragic effects of climate change, which are a real threat to the future of the international community.

Given these realities, we must adopt, within the framework of the United Nations, a global, inclusive approach in order to, first, ensure general reform of the United Nations as a precondition to the establishment of financial institutions that can respond to the expectations of our countries and counter speculative movements and the virtual markets' dominance over the realities of the world economy. Secondly, the reform of the United Nations should make it possible for an effective collective security system to emerge that will be able to respond to the breadth and complexity of the challenges that the international community faces. Thirdly, we must ensure the success of upcoming events and programmes on the United Nations agenda, in order to achieve real awareness-raising and so that decisive action can be taken to settle the problems caused by climate change.

If Algeria is encouraging the adoption of a global approach at this crucial point of the world's development, it is because it has participated in certain initiatives that have demonstrated how effective they can be at the regional level. Here, I would refer to the many efforts undertaken by the Sahel countries, along with their partners, during the international conference on development and the fight against terrorism held recently in Algeria. This allowed us to make important

decisions on containing the phenomenon of terrorism, reducing its effects and attacking its root causes. Beyond the fight against terrorism, the conference also insisted on highlighting a priority that is often forgotten, which is putting the issue of development at the very heart of all cooperation efforts. Such cooperation, which is currently very crucial at the regional level, requires support from our partners that responds to the needs expressed by our countries.

I would like to devote the last part of my comments to recent measures undertaken by my country to reinforce political, economic and social reforms aimed at strengthening the rule of law and good governance. On the political and institutional levels, these reforms include a review of the Constitution, the adoption of a new law on information and the media, the decriminalization of press offences, an opening of audiovisual media, an amendment of the law on political parties and of the electoral law, and the strengthening of the role of women in elected bodies.

These political reforms are based on our firm desire to promote human rights as broadly as possible, as was reiterated to all the special rapporteurs who have visited Algeria since November 2010.

On the economic level, decisive measures have been taken to improve the business climate, free up productive energy and reinforce the role of companies and institutions as the drivers of growth and development. On the social level, as Algeria is concerned about the future of its youth, it has increased the number of its assistance and employment programmes for the various categories of youth so that they can make a smooth integration into the labour market. These measures will of course lead to a strengthening of the democratic process and of the rule of law through an inclusive approach that brings together all the political and social forces in my country.

The Acting President: I now call on His Highness Sheikh Abdullah Bin Zayed Al Nahyan, Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs of the United Arab Emirates.

Sheikh Abdullah Bin Zayed Al Nahyan (United Arab Emirates) (*spoke in Arabic*): It is my pleasure to take this opportunity to congratulate the President of this session, who is the Permanent Representative of our sister State of Qatar, for his election as President of the sixty-sixth session of the United Nations General Assembly. I am confident that his experience in international political and diplomatic affairs will contribute to the success of this session's work. I wish him every success. I also wish to commend his predecessor, His Excellency Joseph Deiss, for his outstanding leadership of the previous session of the General Assembly. In addition, I would like to congratulate His Excellency Mr. Ban Ki-Moon on the renewed confidence in him and his reappointment as Secretary-General of this international Organization for a second term. I would also like to take this opportunity to congratulate the Republic of South Sudan for joining our international Organization as a State Member of the United Nations, along with the people of Libya for their Transitional National Council's taking Libya's seat in the United Nations.

Addressing enormous international challenges depends on the extent of consolidated and collective work, with the participation of all States, including the small and developing ones, in international decision-making structures, institutions and mechanisms, based on the principles of equality, justice and transparency.

My country has therefore undertaken extensive preventive diplomatic efforts in order to contain the tensions and disputes occurring in its surroundings and beyond. The United Arab Emirates vigorously seeks to enhance its humanitarian and economical programmes to several developing countries, particularly to those countries undergoing conflicts or natural disasters, in addition to its other effective contributions to peacekeeping operations, protection of civilians, and re-building efforts. Those contributions represent our significant partnership with several parties, and our dedication to achieve the noble objectives of maintaining and consolidating international peace and security.

The solid strategic political approach adopted by the United Arab Emirates is not limited to bilateral and regional cooperation; it is also evident in the way we handle all issues. My country seeks to establish peace and security, eliminate tensions from the region and enhance confidence-building measures. We apply the same approach in dealing with the occupation by the Islamic Republic of Iran of the three Emirate islands of Abu Musa, and the Greater and Lesser Tumbs. Since the illegitimate occupation of those islands in 1971, my country has adopted a flexible diplomatic approach to resolve this issue through peaceful means, either through direct bilateral negotiations, or by referring the

matter to the International Court of Justice. This has been our approach throughout the last four decades.

However, the United Arab Emirates expresses its deep concern over the lack of progress in direct, regional and international contacts made so far with the Islamic Republic of Iran with a view to reaching a peaceful, just and permanent solution. The actions taken by Iran with the aim of changing the legal, physical and demographic situation of the islands are null and void and have no legal effect whatsoever. Those Iranian actions also constitute a violation of international law, as well as of the United Nations Charter. Therefore, we call on the Islamic Republic of Iran to enter into serious and direct negotiations between the two countries, or to refer the issue to the International Court of Justice in light of its continuous illegal occupation of the three islands, which are an integral part of the territorial sovereignty of the United Arab Emirates.

We have been closely monitoring the major developments and complications surrounding the Palestinian issue, which unfortunately resulted in halting the efforts and chances of resuming peace talks. It is time to resolve this issue in all its humanitarian, legal and political aspects. The core of the solution for this issue lies in the establishment of a full-fledged sovereign State within the 4 June 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital. Comprehensive and just peace between Arab countries and Israel would greatly assist in reducing tensions and deprive the voices of extremism and violence from using this ongoing issue as a major justifications for their extremism and violence.

My country has been closely monitoring the recent events in the brotherly Kingdom of Bahrain, which have adversely affected its peace and stability. While we are extending every required support to the Kingdom of Bahrain, we denounce any external intervention in Bahrain's internal affairs.

We believe that the measures and good efforts undertaken by His Majesty King Hamad bin Issa Al Khalifa of Bahrain to promote national dialogue among all segments of Bahraini society are important steps that seek to maintain peace and stability in the Kingdom, preserve civil peace, strengthen national unity and pursue reforms and progress, in a manner that will realize the hopes and aspirations of all the people of Bahrain.

We emphasize that the sovereignty, security and territorial integrity of the Kingdom of Bahrain are an integral part of the security and stability of the Arabian Gulf region, and also part of the responsibilities of the Arab Gulf Cooperation Council in the region. All members of the Council are keen to consolidate good neighbourly relations with all States, based on the principles of international law and other international instruments.

The United Arab Emirates renews through this international platform its full commitment to the sovereignty, independence, territorial integrity and national unity of Libya. We also stress our commitment to Security Council resolutions 1970 (2011) and 1973 (2011) with regard to the protection of civilians. Since the beginning of the Libyan crisis, we have focused on the humanitarian assistance aspect and the protection of civilians. We realized these goals within the efforts of the international community. We will continue to support Libya and its people in the upcoming reconstruction phase. We believe that the honourable people of Libya and its leadership are capable of identifying the characteristics of next phase in order to enhance Libya's stature within the international community and strengthen its development and stability. To this end, my country calls on our international partners to intensify their efforts to release the remaining Libyan frozen assets.

My country has also made substantial direct contributions for the reconstruction of Afghanistan, for restoring peace and stability in the country and for alleviating the suffering of its people. Success in this regard will be a focal point in countering extremism, militancy, and international terrorism in the Arabian Gulf region. In addition, peace and security in Afghanistan have a direct impact on regional security and on the security of the Arab Gulf region. From this platform, I call on all Afghani parties to cooperate in achieving a process of comprehensive national reconciliation and extending the control of the Government over all Afghani regions. We also look forward to the international conference on Afghanistan to be held in Bonn next December.

Food security is one of the biggest challenges facing the world today. It is estimated that in 2010 more than 900 million people worldwide suffered from chronic hunger. The recent tragedy of famine in the Horn of Africa has demonstrated the urgent need for concrete efforts on the part of the international

community to ensure protection for the most vulnerable peoples in times of crisis.

In a serious discussion of the issue of food security, we cannot overlook the significance of water security, especially in view of the fact that agricultural production consumes around 70 per cent of fresh water resources globally. My country therefore deems it important to include the issue of water scarcity and security in future plans aimed at increasing food production worldwide. Living as we do in a region that suffers from a scarcity of water, we are more aware of its importance, which prompts us to stress the need for the international community to tackle this challenge decisively and urgently.

In December, my country will celebrate its fortieth anniversary. One of the major successes and positive indicators of human development that we have achieved has been the advancement and empowerment of Emirati women. With the support of our leadership and society, we have been able to arrive at the optimum balance between our traditions and the demands of development and participation required to build our society. In this context, I would like to take the opportunity commend the establishment of the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women). In support of this newly established and promising entity, the United Arab Emirates hereby announces its contribution of $5 million to the UN-Women fund.

In conclusion, we hope that our deliberations at this session of the Assembly will contribute to the promotion and development of all forms of understanding, solidarity and international cooperation aimed at addressing the global issues on our agenda.

The Acting President: I now call on His Excellency Mr. Hamrokhon Zarifi, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Tajikistan.

Mr. Zarifi (Tajikistan) (*spoke in Russian*): Allow me to congratulate His Excellency Mr. Nassir Abdulaziz Al-Nasser on his assumption of the post of President of the General Assembly at its sixty-sixth session. I have every confidence that his wealth of experience will contribute to the achievement of important results in our collective work. I would also like to congratulate His Excellency Mr. Ban Ki-moon on his reappointment as Secretary-General.

Two weeks ago the people of Tajikistan celebrated a solemn event in their modern history — the twentieth anniversary of independence for the Republic of Tajikistan. Despite numerous difficulties and challenges, the Republic of Tajikistan, during the years of its independence, has succeeded in achieving considerable progress and laying a foundation for gradual social and economic development. We greatly appreciate the contributions made by the United Nations and its Member States to the establishment and development of an independent, sovereign and democratic Tajikistan, governed by the rule of law.

The maintenance of peace and security remains a top priority for the entire international community. For this reason, it is essential that Member States shoulder their due responsibilities and take the joint measures necessary to bring a speedy halt to wars and conflicts. We welcome the settlement in South Sudan and the accession of the Republic of the South Sudan as the new, 193rd Member of the United Nations. Tajikistan also calls on all parties concerned to maximize their efforts towards a speedy and full settlement of the continuing conflict in the Middle East. We support the State of Palestine in its efforts to take its well-deserved place as a fully fledged member of the community of nations.

The Government of Tajikistan, aware of its responsibility for addressing social and economic issues, has been working consistently to maximize its own capacity to attain the Millennium Development Goals. Implementation of our national strategy for development of the Republic of Tajikistan is a key priority of our Government. Proceeding from principles of sustainable development for our economy, the Government of Tajikistan has identified three major goals: ensuring energy and food security, and tackling the country's isolation in terms of communications.

International trade and direct investments can also help in achieving our development goals. We believe that the international trade system must remain open, fair, predictable and non-discriminatory. Guided by these principles, Tajikistan is currently in active talks on joining the World Trade Organization (WTO). In this regard, we are seeking the support of WTO member States to help speed up the process of Tajikistan's entry.

The problems of climate change and its negative effects cannot be overcome without the collective and

coordinated efforts of the entire international community. We know that climate change affects fresh water resources as well as exacerbating extreme floods, landslides, droughts and other natural disasters. In Tajikistan, where about 60 per cent of the water resources for the whole of Central Asia originate, more than 35 per cent of glaciers have disappeared in the last 30 years. The accelerated melting of glaciers creates additional risks for sustainable development and regional water, energy and food security. In that regard, at the United National Climate Change Conference in Copenhagen, the President of Tajikistan put forward a proposal to set up an international fund for saving glaciers, which could combine the efforts of the international community in this strategically important area. We hope that Member States will support this initiative.

The comprehensive development of hydroelectricity, combined with other types of renewable energy, will enable us not only to increase the capacity of our energy systems but also to enhance their stability and increased efficiency, and considerably decrease harmful emissions into the atmosphere. For more than 10 years, the Republic of Tajikistan has experienced a severe electric power shortage in winter. Owing to a lack of other energy sources, it is vital that Tajikistan, which possesses enormous hydropower potential, begin to undertake consistent, comprehensive development of its hydro-energy sector.

Tajikistan is prepared to cooperate closely on all issues of the rational use of water and energy resources with every country in the region and with due consideration for common regional interests. This has been repeatedly emphasized by the President of Tajikistan, Mr. Emomali Rahmon, including in the General Assembly's general debate at its sixty-third and sixty-fourth sessions, and in other international forums on the subject of water.

As is well known, in the second half of the twentieth century the Central Asian region was confronted with a massive ecological crisis: the drying up of the Aral Sea. Wilful disregard for rational, careful and responsible use of natural resources has led to the death, for all practical purposes, of the Aral Sea. The enormous number of reservoirs that have been built and continue to be built across vast areas downstream of the Aral Sea have also contributed considerably to its drying up. The total water content of those reservoirs and bodies of water represents 1.5 times the water content of the Aral Sea. Overcoming this crisis will require not just massive capital investment in the water sector but also political will and a readiness to implement long-term joint measures for the rational use of water and energy resources throughout the Aral Sea region.

It is for this reason that Tajikistan suggested that the United Nations should carry out a comprehensive expert study of water use in Central Asia, including on issues related to the effectiveness and rationality of the use of existing reservoirs and an investigation of the environmental situation in the region as a whole.

Water is a crucial resource of immense importance to sustainable development and to life on our planet. We need to strengthen international and regional water cooperation through the effective use of existing mechanisms and instruments. With that in mind, Tajikistan called for the proclamation of 2013 as the International Year of Water Cooperation.

Terrorism is one of the major threats to the international peace and security. Tajikistan condemns terrorism in all its forms and manifestations. We believe that we must swiftly adopt a universal convention on international terrorism.

The prevention of illicit drug trafficking is part of the fight against terrorism. The urgency of this problem is a clear indication of the threat it poses to international stability and security. My country is making its contribution to the fight against the drug trade. We have set up an anti-drugs body that cooperates with other international organizations and similar services of other States in taking measures to fight illicit drug trafficking in our region.

Tajikistan reiterates its commitment to the full and effective implementation of the Ottawa Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on Their Destruction. My country unreservedly supports a mine-free Central Asia. We support the adoption of measures leading to the demining of mined areas and the tackling of other mine-related problems.

Tajikistan is concerned at the situation in the neighbouring country of Afghanistan. It was with great sorrow that we learned of the tragic death of the former President of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, Mr. Burhanuddin Rabbani. He was one of the most important figures in recent Afghan history and, indeed,

in the region and the world as a whole. We would like to express our heartfelt condolences to the people and the Government of Afghanistan.

Tajikistan supports the international strategy for a comprehensive peace settlement in Afghanistan and post-conflict rehabilitation. We deem it important to involve Afghanistan in regional integration through economic and trade cooperation with neighbouring countries. I should like to recall the efforts of the Dushanbe quartet — Afghanistan, Pakistan, the Russian Federation and Tajikistan — in favour of trade and economic cooperation, the fight against terrorism and the fight against drugs and organized crime.

We have opened five bridges on the border between Tajikistan and Afghanistan, and three additional bridges are being built. This year we also constructed a 220-kilovolt power line linking Tajikistan and Afghanistan. We are seeking to address the issue of energy shortages in Afghanistan and in Pakistan by building up the hydro-electrical capacity of the Central Asian countries through the CASA-1000 project.

The continued post-conflict economic development of Afghanistan is on the agenda of the fifth Regional Economic Cooperation Conference on Afghanistan, to be held next spring in Dushanbe.

Global problems and regional challenges cannot be addressed without a strengthened United Nations. The process of reforming the United Nations must be carried out in a rational manner, and the renewed United Nations must become a strong partner that is able to react to events across the world and rise to the multiple global challenges that we face in this new age.

Tajikistan will continue to assist the United Nations in every possible way in its efforts to build a peaceful, secure and healthy planet.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. José Badia, Government Councillor for External Relations and for International Economic and Financial Affairs of the Principality of Monaco.

Mr. Badia (Monaco) (*spoke in French*): Allow me at the outset to warmly congratulate Mr. Al-Nasser on his election as President of the General Assembly and to assure him of the support of my delegation throughout the sixty-sixth session of the Assembly.

The Secretary-General, whom I heartily congratulate on his unanimous reappointment, introduced, at the opening of the general debate, the priorities that he intends to implement during his second term in office. His vision, which will guide our endeavours and our deliberations during this period of instability and uncertainty, sets forth the parameters for a new form of global governance that will need to, on the one hand, respond to the challenges that we face and to the aspirations of our peoples and, on the other, take into consideration the new realities of our time.

Among these new imperatives of the twenty-first century, sustainable development and the building of a safer world require a more responsible approach on the part of all our Governments and the renewal of our unwavering support for the Organization, whose crucial role in the prevention of conflicts, human rights violations and natural disasters needs to be strengthened and supported.

It was Mr. Al-Nasser's clear-sighted initiative to make the role of mediation in the settlement of disputes by peaceful means the theme of the general debate. Our community now has a new Member — the Republic of South Sudan — following a peace process that was welcomed by all. Since the beginning of the year, we have seen a great impetus towards freedom and democracy among thousands of women and men across the Arab world. The Arab Spring has highlighted once again the universal nature of the norms and values of the Organization. Justice, democracy, human dignity, equality and freedom have led to renewed hope among peoples for too long repressed. Today we face a great challenge: not to disappoint them.

The Government of the Principality reiterates its support for and its solidarity with all who fight for respect for fundamental freedoms and the rule of law, and in that regard is hopeful that a just, lasting and comprehensive settlement will enable the State of Israel and a viable, sovereign and democratic Palestinian State to live side by side in peace and security.

The past year has been rich in challenges for our Organization. We have had to face great natural and humanitarian disasters, emergency situations caused by people and the fallout of the economic crisis. Each time we turn to this Organization to safeguard humanity's shared assets, such as the environment, health and peace.

We also turn to the United Nations to protect our collective security. The deadly attack a few weeks ago on the United Nations offices in Abuja, the capital of Nigeria, cruelly reminded us of the innumerable risks faced by United Nations personnel across the world — in Côte d'Ivoire, Afghanistan, Iraq, Darfur, the Sudan, everywhere where the United Nations has saved lives or upheld rights. They sometimes pay the ultimate price.

But our Organization has limited resources and cannot always deal with the multiplication of conflicts. We must therefore focus above all on the prevention of conflicts. What is a better prevention measure than development? Last year from this same rostrum His Serene Highness Prince Albert II of Monaco reiterated the Principality's commitment to achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) (see A/65/PV.4). Monaco seeks to be a responsible, reliable and supportive partner, and its priorities continue to be improving the quality of life of the most vulnerable people.

I wish to underscore the essential role of women in the prevention and settlement of conflicts and in peacebuilding. Women and girls must be at the centre of our development strategies. It is now an established fact that a society that guarantees equality between women and men and promotes the economic independence of women is a more prosperous society. If we wish women to be able to realize their potential in the economic sector, we need to get rid of obstacles such as discriminatory regulations. We need to ensure that women have equal access to economic resources, particularly to land, credit, science and technology, vocational training, information, communication and markets.

In this regard, the Principality of Monaco wishes to reiterate its support for UN-Women and its Executive Director, Ms. Michelle Bachelet.

It is our shared responsibility to show our commitment in the crucial gathering of 2012 — the twentieth anniversary of the Rio Earth Summit — and to create a solid basis for the comprehensive development of a green economy.

We are seeking to develop sources of renewable energy, more environmentally friendly and healthy. But in the short term, we are not in a position to abandon nuclear energy or oil. As we have learned so painfully through the Fukushima accident, we do not know whether one day it will be possible to fully control all the risks involved in nuclear energy. We thus continue to burn hydrocarbons, sending their emissions into the atmosphere. These pitfalls pose a great danger to our collective security.

It is time to put an end to the ideological debates and the divides that separate us and that delay our efforts to implement a green economy.

The Secretary-General proposed that we establish a new generation of development objectives to succeed the MDGs after 2015. The Principality of Monaco supports that initiative, which aims to encourage the international community to set ambitious goals and to provide the wherewithal to achieve them.

As part of its contribution to that endeavour, Prince Albert II wanted Monaco to contribute actively to the preparatory work for the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development by organizing in the Principality, from 28 to 30 November 2011, a meeting of high-level experts on the sustainable management of oceans. His Serene Highness would like to see the international community place the seas and oceans at the top of the political agenda at the forthcoming Earth Summit.

In spite of the development of a legal framework to govern activities in the oceans, the negative impacts of human activities on oceans and seas are becoming increasingly visible. Marine pollution and unsustainable practices in the exploitation of marine resources are continuing to endanger marine ecosystems, to the detriment of future generations. Climate change has had a significant impact on oceans, leading to the phenomena of acidification, rising sea levels and coral bleaching. Sustainable management of the oceans is an essential pillar of the green economy.

Stronger prevention measures, at the service of all Member States, both developed and developing, will enable the Organization to carry out its role with greater efficiency and flexibility. That requires the strengthening of its institutions, taking greater account of the role of the General Assembly, balanced reform of the Security Council, increasing cooperation with regional organizations, enhanced interaction with civil society and private sector partnerships.

I wish to hail the leadership and political courage of His Excellency Mr. Joseph Deiss, President of the General Assembly at its sixty-fifth session, who

endeavoured to impose the moral force of the United Nations before the eyes of the entire world.

The Principality of Monaco will not fail to work for the improvement of global governance that our community hopes and prays for. We share the conviction regarding the immense importance of the universal values upheld and defended by the Organization, values to which future Members must adhere, as we have done.

The Acting President: I now call on His Excellency Mr. Bruno Rodríguez Parrilla, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Cuba.

Mr. Rodríguez Parrilla (Cuba) (*spoke in Spanish*): I am pleased to welcome the Government of South Sudan as a State Member of the United Nations. I also join the appeal by all African leaders for an urgent, effective and international response to the famine in the Horn of Africa.

While we are engaged in debate here, in Libya another preventive war is taking place under the pretext of protecting civilians. The United States and NATO, supposedly to avoid a massacre, launched a military attack against a sovereign State without there being any threat whatsoever to international peace and security. They unleashed a regime change operation. NATO imposed on the Security Council a dubious resolution authorizing

> "Member States ... acting nationally or through regional organizations or arrangements ... to take all necessary measures ... to protect civilians and civilian populated areas under threat of attack" (*resolution 1973 (2011), para. 4*).

Afterwards, NATO violated this same resolution in order to supply weapons, provide financing to one party and deploy operatives and diplomatic personnel on the ground. Now everybody has a better understanding of what the concept of responsibility to protect means and how it can be used. In this war, in addition to the most advanced and lethal military technologies, the means of communication have been used as weapons of war by financial and media businesses, which are profiteering from the war and the reconstruction operations, as if they were agents of crisis containment.

As early as 21 February, Commander-in-Chief Fidel Castro Ruz warned that NATO was irrevocably preparing a war against Libya. Since then, Cuba has engaged indefatigably in the defence not of a Government but of a principle. It is unacceptable to assassinate thousands of innocent people under the dubious purpose of protecting other civilians. History has eloquently demonstrated that peace cannot be imposed either by war or by force. It is up to the Libyan people alone to choose their destiny, without foreign intervention, in the exercise of their right to self-determination, independence and sovereignty over their natural resources and their country's territorial integrity.

The military intervention in Libya and the growing threat against Syria have been the opportunistic, defensive responses of the United States and Europe to the collapse of their system of domination and plunder in North Africa and the Middle East and to the emergence of genuinely popular movements in Tunisia, Egypt and other countries, in order to secure huge reserves of oil and water and to confiscate financial assets in times of global economic and social crisis. It is the responsibility of the General Assembly to exercise its full powers to prevent a military aggression against Syria. The public should be have objective information and speak up against war.

President Barack Obama, in his threatening, deceitful, rhetorical speeches of 20 and 21 September, described what happened in Libya as a new model. He said,

> "This is how the international community should work in the twenty-first century. More nations are assuming the responsibility and the costs of meeting global challenges. In fact, this is the very purpose of the United Nations. So every nation represented here today can take pride in the innocent lives we saved and in helping Libyans reclaim their country. It was the right thing to do."

A top White House official wrote in *Foreign Affairs* magazine that the new United States strategy is more efficient and less costly. The Bush Administration strategy considered occupation; the Obama Administration strategy is that of national liberation. The military intervention strategy in Libya could also be applied in other cases.

With absolute cynicism, what is proposed is a military aggression without casualties or the use of infantry troops, the costs of which would be mainly borne by Europe. The destabilization of a country

through subversion, covert operations and economic sanctions is described, according to this doctrine, as the development of a national movement. That new regime-change operations model shows that current United States and NATO military doctrines are even more aggressive than their previous ones, and that the so called Euro-Atlantic periphery comprises the entire planet.

No one should doubt that Latin America and the Caribbean are included in that concept. The redeployment of the Fourth Fleet, the installation of American bases, troops and military means to intervene anywhere in the region, the coup d'état against Venezuela in 2002, followed by an oil coup, the sedition in Santa Cruz, Bolivia, the military coup in Honduras and the attempted coup in Ecuador all fit perfectly in the new strategy.

Can the United States and NATO guarantee today that the use of force and this concept of regime change do not apply in the case of Latin American and Caribbean countries that do not submit to their interests? Can the European Union say something about it? What would the United Nations do in such a situation?

The weakness of the global economy, particularly the economies of the United States and Europe, continues to show that the economic crisis that began in the year 2008 has not yet been overcome. In developed countries, the terrible burden of its consequences is borne by workers, the unemployed, immigrants and the poor, who are brutally repressed whenever they peacefully defend their rights.

We, the countries of the South, repeatedly plundered, suffer the distortions of a world economic order that excludes our legitimate interests. We suffer under the onerous impact of protectionism and the steady increase in the prices of foodstuffs and hydrocarbons. The peoples of many developing countries are victims of the bankrupt neoliberal economic model and its sequel of plunder and exclusion. The social and political consequences are being felt on all continents.

In the face of a global economic crisis and the depletion of the planet's natural resources, what will be the response of the extremist right-wing forces that are already in power or may come to power as a result of the afflictions and hopelessness of voters? In the face of a growing and universal danger of war, of a new division of the world and of climate change, could we, the countries of the South, act together as an essential condition of our salvation?

In the face of so many serious threats, Latin America and the Caribbean — the region of Bolívar and Martí — is coming together, determined to finish what they left unfinished. It is impossible to divide us or to turn us against each other. The Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America is a small but morally powerful group of peoples, and the new Community of Latin American and Caribbean States is a fact. The full strength of the Andes will very soon be expressed in a summit, which will be an epoch-making event in Caracas — the epicentre of independence in the Americas, where a Bolivarian people has conquered power and a continental leader, President Hugo Chávez Frías, is ever growing.

More than ever, we have to defend the United Nations, but the biggest challenge will be to turn it into an organization that serves the legitimate interests of all States, instead of catering to the arbitrary wishes and abuses of a few rich and powerful countries. We must see to it that international law and the purposes and principles of the United Nations Charter prevail in the face of the brute force that aims to block them. It is necessary to re-establish the leading role of the General Assembly and to recast the Security Council.

The General Assembly has the inescapable moral, political and legal obligation to ensure the recognition of an independent Palestinian State, with the boundaries established before 1967 and with East Jerusalem as its capital, as a full Member of the United Nations. This should be accomplished with or without the Security Council, with or without the veto of the United States and with or without new peace negotiations.

If the inalienable right of the Palestinian people to independence, sovereignty and self-determination is recognized; if the need to re-establish the exercise of the human rights of Palestinians is recognized; if the blockade of Gaza, the economic coercion and segregation symbolized by the infamous wall are recognized as crimes; if the subjugation of a nation to conditions jeopardizing its very existence is described as genocide; if all Member States are supposed to adopt all legal measures within their reach to protect Palestinian civilians, then the General Assembly should take action now.

Cuba, a country with a small Jewish community, condemns the historical injustice of anti-Semitism, the crime against humanity that was the Holocaust, and recognizes the right of the State of Israel to exist. Our people harbour only fraternal feelings towards the Israeli people, who are also victims of this conflict.

Cuba likewise proclaims that the United States has the moral, political and legal obligation to stop its continual veto of Security Council resolutions intended to protect the Palestinian civilians.

The European Union should oppose this veto and abstain from supporting the empire's brutal pressure on members of this Assembly and the Council itself. Europe should denounce it also because it is certain that those crimes would not be occurring without the military supplies, financial support and impunity that the United States provides to the Government of Israel.

On 11 September 2001, we Cubans shared the pain of the American people at those atrocious terrorist acts. We offered selfless solidarity, encouragement and cooperation. As always, Cuba made crystal-clear statements against terrorism and against war.

Ten years later, the world is even more insecure, because instead of turning international consensus against terrorism into a system of international cooperation to confront it, the United States invaded and occupied Iraq and Afghanistan, causing the loss of life of hundreds of thousands of persons and pain to tens of millions. It was not possible to hide the use of deception, torture, extrajudicial executions or assassinations, disappearances of individuals, arbitrary detentions and the secret renditions and prisons of the Central Intelligence Agency in Europe and other regions.

The Government of the United States desecrates the memory of the victims of 11 September when it continues the prolonged inhumane imprisonment of the five Cuban anti-terrorist fighters who were unjustly condemned, in spurious trials, to sentences of maximum severity for seeking information about the terrorist activities of groups that have operated with absolute impunity from United States territory against Cuba, leading to the death of or physical harm to 5,577 of our citizens. Once again, with all due respect, I urge President Obama to make use of his powers to release them as an act of justice or as a humanitarian gesture, which would be highly appreciated by their children, wives, mothers, fathers and all of our people.

The Cuban Government reiterates its interest and willingness to move towards the normalization of relations with the United States. Today I reiterate the proposal to begin a dialogue aimed at solving bilateral problems, including humanitarian issues, as well as our offer to negotiate several cooperation agreements concerning drug-trafficking, terrorism, human smuggling, natural disasters and protection of the environment, including in the event of oil spills such as the one that occurred at the British Petroleum platform in the Gulf of Mexico.

However, we know that the electoral race has already begun in this country, while the economic situation is growing worse.

The economic, commercial and financial blockade of Cuba has been tightened. The damages it has caused have totalled $975 billion, based on the current price of gold. The attempt to subvert the constitutional order that Cubans have freely elected is intensifying. There is increasing pressure from the extreme right and the Cuban-American mafia to reverse the minimal steps adopted by the American Government to promote, to some degree, links between Cuban émigrés and their home country and exchanges between both peoples.

In Cuba, President Raúl Castro Ruz has reiterated that we will continue, in our own sovereign way, to change everything that needs to be changed in order to make our economy more efficient and our socialism better, to achieve full justice and to be able to fully preserve our independence.

As Martí said, "The southern sea will join the sea of the north and a serpent will hatch from the egg of an eagle before we cease our struggle to make the homeland free and prosperous."

The Acting President: I now call on His Excellency Mr. Uri Rosenthal, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of the Netherlands.

Mr. Rosenthal (Netherlands): In May I visited Tunisia, the cradle of the revolutions that have spread across the Arab world. I spoke to many people there who told me about their deep yearning for freedom, about the decades during which their freedom had been suppressed and about what the revolution meant for their lives. One of them was Essma Ben Hamida, the strong-willed director of a civil society organization active in micro-finance. She said literally to me, "If

democracy would mean that I lose my rights as a woman, I do not want democracy." In one sentence, Ms. Ben Hamida defined one of the key challenges we face.

The call from the streets of the Arab world for freedom and democracy has brought about great change. It has inspired people around the world to claim their rights.

But huge challenges remain. And the severe financial and economic crisis is threatening growth and trade around the globe. This crisis is undermining people's ability to earn a living and enjoy freedom to the fullest extent. It is thus crucial that we manage these developments.

The United Nations and individual Governments must support people's calls for freedom. Freedom is a right for everyone, a duty for Governments and the mission of the United Nations. Freedom must be supported by three key pillars: first, security; second, democracy and the rule of law; and third, prosperity.

Lack of security is a fundamental threat to people's freedom. Providing security is a responsibility of Governments and of the international community as a whole.

In March this year, we rose to the challenge. Security Council resolution 1973 (2011) on Libya was truly historic. It explicitly referred to the international community's responsibility to protect. It highlighted the indispensable role of the United Nations.

By contrast, the Council's failure to reach consensus on Syria has been at great human cost. Every day we are shocked by new, horrific stories. This very weekend peaceful demonstrators were carrying a sign that read: "Help Syria. It is bleeding." We need to listen to the people of Syria. We need to stop President Al-Assad's Government from brutally murdering his own citizens in an attempt to crush their legitimate call for freedom. I urge all members of the Security Council to act decisively and agree on targeted sanctions against the regime.

Freedom and security are also key issues in the Middle East peace process. If we do want peace, we need direct negotiations now, not new resolutions at the United Nations. The Netherlands endorses the time frame outlined by the Quartet and stands ready to assist wherever it can. We are a major donor to the Palestinian Authority. We fully support the ambition of the Palestinian people to build a viable, democratic and peaceful Palestinian State. However, this cannot be viewed separately from the Israeli people's desire to live in a secure, internationally recognized Jewish State in peace with their neighbours.

It is really essential that the two parties invest in mutual confidence, refrain from unilateral steps and find a solution together. They should be prepared to make the difficult and painful concessions necessary for the fulfilment of their peoples' aspirations. I talked with President Abbas. I talked with Prime Minister Netanyahu. I listened carefully to what they had to say, and the message is simple and clear: negotiate, negotiate, negotiate.

Mr. Thomson (Fiji), Vice-President, took the Chair.

Democracy and the rule of law are the best guarantees for freedom, but they require hard work. As Francis Fukuyama put it, democracy is more than the majority voting in elections. It is a complex set of institutions that restrain and regularize the exercise of power through law and a system of checks and balances. That is what it is about.

I admire the tremendous courage that people, young and old, have shown to claim their individual liberty and democratic rights. We must support their efforts to build truly democratic societies governed by the rule of law. The United Nations should play a leading role by helping with institution-building and developing the rule of law. To that effect, Slovakia and the Netherlands, for their part, are co-chairing the Community of Democracies' task force that is supporting Tunisia's democratic transition.

The international community should also support internet access that is free and uncensored. This is an essential tool for people to exercise their freedom of expression, and we should take great care to make sure they can use it. Countries supporting this cause should really unite around it.

As Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon recently said, "Countries do not become fit for democracy; they become fit through democracy."

Democracy means freedom and equal rights for everyone. It provides opportunities to empower women. Women represent 50 per cent of the world's human capital. It is in every country's own interest to ensure that women take an active role in society and

the economy as well as in the political process in the political power structures. I am convinced that in free and fair elections, extremists who want to take away women's rights will not succeed.

Real democracy also means that the rights of religious groups, including Christians, are respected. Society as a whole should be tolerant towards those with other religions and beliefs. There should be no doubt about that.

Freedom offers the best route to prosperity. The ongoing global economic crisis is affecting prosperity everywhere in our world.

Enabling free trade is vital to economic recovery. Market access is crucial for private sector development. Breaking down the barriers to trade in agricultural products can galvanize entrepreneurship in the countries that really need it the most. The Arab region in particular should benefit from enhanced export opportunities to the European Union.

The beauty of well-regulated free trade is that it is not a zero-sum game; it benefits everyone and it is part and parcel of freedom. This is why the World Trade Organization (WTO) Doha Round must succeed. The world should not and cannot revert to protectionism. The WTO has an important part to play in preventing this. The European Union is also ambitiously negotiating free trade agreements with various partners. Of course, these agreements should fit within the multilateral system.

Free trade leads to economic growth, which in turn should also benefit the poorest countries in this world. To further support their growth, we should enhance their access to education, vocational training and microfinance for women and the poor.

Freedom belongs to us all. Those who have fought to gain their freedom will never give it up. Freedom must be supported through security, democracy and the rule of law, and prosperity. We can achieve this through the efforts of Member States. Since the United Nations is the international forum where global issues and actors come together, it is here at the United Nations that we must join forces. We are witnessing international developments unfolding more rapidly than ever before. The United Nations needs to adapt to maintain its important role in international relations.

For that matter, the Security Council should better reflect changing international relations and economic realities. The Netherlands supports a modest enlargement of the Security Council, but with a limit on the right of veto in order not to undermine the effectiveness of the Council's decision-making process.

The Netherlands supports the Secretary-General's drive for budgetary discipline. We have to make careful choices about what to finance and what not to. I also urge emerging economies to take their share of responsibility for the sustainability of United Nations funding.

The United Nations has an essential role in fostering the rule of law around the world, as well as in preventative diplomacy and mediation. The Netherlands will play its part, including through the role of The Hague as the international city of peace and justice. The Peace Palace, the international courts and the legal institutions attest to our long tradition of international law and active role in its practice. That tradition, may I say, goes back to Grotius's early seventeenth-century *Mare Liberum*, which laid the foundation for international law.

I would like to congratulate Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon on his reappointment. I call on him to use the overwhelming support for his second term as a mandate to reform the United Nations. A strong and active United Nations is essential in a world in which no country can shape the future single-handedly. To succeed, public support for the United Nations is crucial. Clear and tangible results are necessary to sustain the commitment of Governments to the United Nations. An effective and efficient United Nations is in the national interests of all its Member States, and is, indeed, essential for freedom throughout the world.

Through our efforts at the United Nations, we can support the calls for freedom around the world. Then, on my next visit to Tunisia, Essma Ben Hamida, a strong-willed woman, can hopefully tell me that freedom has brought her both democracy and her rights and empowerment as a woman.

The Acting President: I now call on His Excellency Mr. Ali Ahmed Karti, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of the Sudan.

Mr. Karti (Sudan) (*spoke in Arabic*): It is indeed an honour and a source of pride to see our sister State of Qatar represented in the good person of the

President leading this year's session of the General Assembly. His election was certainly the right choice given his commendable initiatives and contributions to maintaining peace and security, both regionally and internationally, which bear out his qualifications and capabilities. Indeed, we congratulate him on assuming his post. Through you, Sir, may I also convey my congratulations and gratitude to Mr. Joseph Deiss, President of the Assembly at its sixty-fifth session.

We would also like to congratulate His Excellency the Secretary-General on his reappointment. We commend him and his colleagues on their admirable efforts in the various areas in which the Organization is active. We hope that our deliberations this year will benefit humankind and serve to promote peace, harmony and cooperation among peoples and nations.

I address the Assembly today as the Sudan approaches the international community with new momentum, having recently provided an exemplary model in choosing peace and stability, even though their price entailed sacrificing a dear part of our country's territory. During the past six years, the international community has followed the Government of the Sudan's degree of commitment to the choice of peace through the implementation of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement, which we concluded and signed on 9 January 2005.

Despite the obstacles and challenges facing the implementation of the Agreement from the start, we have continued to implement it with perseverance and patience. That culminated in the holding of the referendum on the self-determination of South Sudan and, eventually, the acceptance of its result. We were the first country to recognize the nascent Republic of South Sudan, extending a hand of cooperation and brotherhood to it.

The international community has also followed the historic visit that our country's President, Mr. Omer Hassan Al-Bashir, paid to the city of Juba prior to the holding of the referendum, as well as his participation in the celebrations declaring the establishment of the State of South Sudan on 9 July. His address on that occasion outlined the guiding principles that established the basis of our warm and friendly relations, discarding the negative atmosphere and bitterness of the past and looking towards the broader horizons of cooperation and communication that serve the interests of that country's brotherly people. From this rostrum, we reiterate our commitment to that spirit. We also reiterate our congratulations to the State of South Sudan as it takes its place among the Members of the United Nations.

Allow me to take this opportunity to welcome the National Transitional Council as the legitimate representative of the brotherly people of Libya at the United Nations, following the revolution that Libya experienced and the changes it has brought about.

The separation leading to the establishment of the independent State of South Sudan does not mean a definitive divorce, in particular as we live in an era of globalization and State alliances and groupings that transcend political boundaries and traditional frameworks. Moreover, until recently our two peoples were one, connected by common denominators and various historical, cultural and social ties.

Given those facts, we are resolute in our full commitment to settling all outstanding issues with regard to the implementation of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement, including the situation in the Abyei region, in order to complete the border demarcation and the necessary joint measures and mechanisms required to monitor the border and address economic issues, including access to oil and oil revenues.

We also affirm that we are committed to reaching security and political arrangements that address all the recent tensions in Southern Kordofan and Blue Nile states. As I have said before, we accepted the choice of separation not because we were bored with unity, for we had paid dearly for that unity, but because we wanted sustainable peace and stability. It is therefore unacceptable and irrational to accept any proxy war that destabilizes those two states, or any other border area between them. That will require understanding of the joint vision that takes into account the special characteristics of the demographic character of the region and the interaction among the tribes in those areas.

With regard to the situation in Darfur, the most recent peace negotiations in the sisterly State of Qatar concluded with the signing of the Doha Document for Peace in Darfur, which was accepted and supported by the various groups in Darfur. That support was evidenced by the broad participation in the all-Darfur stakeholders conference, which was held in May and attended by representatives of internally displaced persons, civil society and leaders from the legislative,

political and executive branches, as well as tribal and political party leaders, elders and local administration. The conference adopted the Doha Document for Peace in Darfur because it responded to all of the aspirations of the people of Darfur in terms of peace, development, stability, justice and political participation. As the Assembly is aware, the Document has received considerable support from the international community.

I wish to take this opportunity to reiterate our appreciation to our sister State of Qatar, the African Union and the League of Arab States, which spearheaded this initiative. We also wish to thank the Joint Mediation Support Team and all regional and international partners who contributed to the agreement. From this rostrum, I again emphasize that we will continue to implement our national strategy on Darfur on the basis of its five pillars: security, development, the resettlement of refugees and internally displaced persons, internal reconciliation and a comprehensive political settlement. We will give top priority to completing the return of internally displaced persons and refugees and to creating stable conditions for them through development, rehabilitation and reconstruction projects.

We expected the Secretary-General to include a special paragraph in his statement to illustrate my Government's commitment to peace, which was evident from the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement and the declaration of the Republic of South Sudan, which my Government was first to recognize as a State. We call on our international Organization not to be hoodwinked by the policies of some countries, which refuse to give credit where it is due. The Sudanese leadership, headed by President Omer Hassan Ahmad Al-Bashir, enabled the people of the South to exercise their right to self-determination. It made a commitment to do so because of its desire for peace and stability. Consequently, it is a leadership that deserves respect and appreciation, not to be the target of attempts at incrimination or of the arbitrary levelling of accusations, for example, by the International Criminal Court.

I need not recall the fact that the President is the leader of the Republic of the Sudan and was legitimately elected in fair and transparent elections conducted under the supervision of international and regional bodies. Moreover, the unilateral and unjustified economic sanctions adopted by the United States of America against the Sudan in order to weaken it and erode its development revival are but unjust and coercive measures against the people of the Sudan. This is happening at a time when we aspire to have the support of the international community as we move towards that goal more openly and with greater determination to fulfil our natural role as an active and pioneering member of the international family.

As a State emerging from conflict, we look forward to the contribution of the international community and its financial institutions in terms of debt forgiveness and support for development projects. That would be consistent with the measures being applied to all least developed countries, as well as to those emerging from conflict and moving into peacebuilding, which has now become a reality. The World Bank has put forward these and other requirements, and has stated that my country has indeed demonstrated compliance in that regard.

Similarly, from this rostrum, we call on all investors, without exception, to try to benefit from the Sudan and its promising resources, especially those other than oil, such as mineral resources and metals. We urge them to invest in the Sudan's agricultural resources, taking into consideration the extent of the country's arable land and its significant water resources. This is particularly important in the light of the food crises, famines resulting from drought and desertification, and the urgent global need for cereals and grains. The Sudan's investment law has provided all necessary facilities to all foreign investors.

The international financial and economic crisis has adversely affected most countries of the world. In the countries of Africa, the crisis has notably intensified and exacerbated the difficulties plaguing the economies of developing nations, resulting in increased poverty and food shortages and the decline of social services.

At a time when climate change is leading to natural disasters in many countries, I call on the General Assembly, all donors and the relevant United Nations agencies, funds and programmes to respond urgently to the devastating famine and the attendant tragic humanitarian situation, which is affecting some of our sister republics in the Horn of Africa, in particular Somalia.

We also wish to highlight the importance of giving issues affecting the African continent a high priority on the development agenda of the United

Nations, with a view to supporting and building the capacities of African economic institutions. This could be accomplished by reactivating the New Partnership for Africa's Development initiative. Priority, support and financing should be given to projects aimed at combating poverty and endemic diseases on the continent, as well as to the relevant programmes linked to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals.

Since development and peace go hand in hand, we wish to emphasize the importance of supporting the institutions of the African Union, especially its Peace and Security Council and its other various mechanisms, to build early-warning conflict prevention capacities. I need not mention that Chapter VIII of the United Nations Charter clearly emphasizes the importance of regional arrangements in strengthening and maintaining international peace and security.

We also wish to emphasize the importance of activating preventive diplomacy mechanisms and African peacemaking efforts. I refer in particular to the experience of the Panel of the Wise of the African Union, headed by former South African President Thabo Mbeki, which is playing a commendable role in the Sudan. This attests to the effectiveness of the role of regional bodies in settling disputes and achieving peace and security in African countries.

The Sudan had hoped for international consensus on climate and environment issues, in particular because we have been directly affected by them, as has clearly been the case in Darfur. United Nations reports have emphasized the relationship between the negative impact of climate change and the intensification of conflict, especially on the African continent. We had also hoped that the efforts made in Copenhagen would have been successful and led to an agreement on how to address this phenomenon and avoid its negative consequences.

We had hoped, too, that developed nations would assume their historic responsibilities in that regard by adopting specific strategies and action plans to tackle the root causes of climate change in a manner consistent with the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development, adopted at the Earth Summit in 1992. The Sudan attaches the highest priority to the implementation of a series of national programmes designed to alleviate the consequences of climate change and to raise awareness as to its dire effects.

The Sudan looks forward to participating actively and effectively in the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development to be held next year, in order to help strengthen international efforts to face the challenges of sustainable development with a collective will that reflects the aspirations of the whole world, developing nations in particular, for development and a decent life for their peoples.

Various entities of the United Nations, including the Security Council, have adopted dozens of resolutions regarding the question of Palestine, none of which have been implemented. This is because of Israel's blatant defiance of the international community and because of the support and protection it enjoys from some powerful countries. This demonstrates that the Organization is incapable of standing up for the rights of peoples and to support their legitimate claims, as enshrined in the Charter. That has given the green light to the occupying authorities to continue with their settlement policies that seek to entrench the occupation and banish the Palestinian people, the owners of the land.

The Sudan therefore fully supports the Palestinian National Authority's decision to request full membership of the United Nations, which is their legal right, based on the right to self-determination, one of the principles of international law. Moreover, the Palestinians' request for recognition as a State is a legitimate right that seeks to confirm that, first, the United Nations is committed to its Charter and, secondly, to international law. This would also help to alleviate tensions in the region. The international community should consider the fact that there may be no one to negotiate with if it allows Israel to impose conditions on the world and to deprive the Palestinians of their legitimate rights.

In conclusion, the reform of the United Nations, and in particular of the Security Council, is an urgent and compelling priority requiring speedy action. Without efforts to reform the Organization and its various entities, we will weaken the role of developing nations and have a negative effect on their national interests. This will also allow bodies such as the Security Council to become a channel through which particular countries impose their own political agendas, especially with regard to international peace and security. Genuine reform of the Security Council and its working methods is therefore the only way to prevent it from being exploited by some countries in a

manner that could cast doubt on the credibility and neutrality of the Organization, whose founders carefully drafted its Charter so as to make it the widest possible forum for consultation and debate — debate that requires cooperation and interaction among peoples, nations, cultures and civilizations in order to create a world in which values such as freedom, peace, security and justice can prevail.

The Acting President: I now call on His Excellency Mr. Manuel Salvador dos Ramos, Minister for Foreign Affairs and Communities of the Democratic Republic of Sao Tome and Principe.

Mr. Salvador dos Ramos (Sao Tome and Principe) (*spoke in Portuguese: English text provided by the delegation*): The Democratic Republic of Sao Tome and Principe joins other speakers at this global forum in congratulating the President on his election to lead the General Assembly at its sixty-sixth session. His election is the acknowledgment by Member States of the more than 30 years' experience that he and his country, Qatar, have given in service of promoting international peace and security, sustainable development and dynamic, multidimensional cooperation among developing countries, as well as in continuing the search for solutions to the challenges facing multilateral diplomacy today.

We also congratulate the President on the significance of the theme of this session, "The role of mediation in conflict resolution through peaceful means", whose relevance and timeliness merit the attention of all of us here and can help ensure that the outcome of our collective discussions will support the United Nations in its effective guidance of global democratic governance and in implementing coherent and consistent mechanisms aimed at achieving lasting peace and a more secure world.

We further congratulate Mr. Ban Ki-moon on his reappointment to the post of Secretary-General, and thank him for the effort and skill with which he has guided the Organization, whose challenges and responsibilities seem more pressing than ever in the current international context. We would also like to pay tribute to the outgoing President, Mr. Joseph Deiss of Switzerland, who carried out his duties with zeal and dedication during the past year.

The theme of this session of the Assembly gives us an opportunity to reflect deeply together on the impact of international mediation on the resolution of conflicts in various regions of our planet. We would like to bring to this reflection a discussion of the central role that the United Nations should play in mediating such conflicts. This exercise should help us formulate concrete proposals for strengthening the capabilities of our Organization in this area.

Mediation as a method of resolving conflicts between States began to be used in 1907 in the form of good offices and mediation on the basis of The Hague Convention for the peaceful regulation of international conflicts. United Nations reports on peacekeeping operations should therefore remind us that the restoration of peace focuses on ongoing conflicts and strives to de-escalate them through diplomacy and mediation. The widespread use of international mediation to resolve crises as a fundamental technique of peaceful conflict resolution has not always matched our expectations or produced the expected results.

It is for that reason that Sao Tome and Principe believes that rather than settling for its role in peacekeeping, international mediation must evolve to become a fundamental factor in peacebuilding. In that regard, the United Nations should be responsible for dealing with what appears today to be a trend towards the professionalization of international mediation, which relegates to the background the legal instruments ratified by specialized institutions to deal with a given conflict. Defining the legal status of the mediator and the methodology of mediation, as well as greater involvement by diplomats and experts with experience in international law, seems to us to be necessary and important steps that the United Nations should take in the future.

The State of Sao Tome and Principe has followed with concern the growing international climate of tension, characterized by proliferating claims in various regions, some of them violent and destructive. Our concern is all the more worrisome given our distinct feeling that in such circumstances the mechanisms available to the United Nations for dealing with such matters effectively and accurately are pushed into the background. We regret the absence of a responsible partnership between the African Union and the Security Council designed to resolve the crisis in Libya.

It is therefore urgent that we strengthen the role of the United Nations by reforming the entire system — a process that should not drag on. This

reform should include the Security Council and some of the specialized agencies of the United Nations, aligning them with the aspirations and demands of the modern world.

On 9 July, Africa saw the birth of one more free and independent nation: the Republic of South Sudan. The Democratic Republic of Sao Tome and Principe, which has already recognized the brotherly State of South Sudan, congratulates its people on this achievement and wishes its leaders every success in building a peaceful and prosperous nation. Similarly, we appeal to the entire international community to make a joint effort to support the new authorities and political actors of that country in order to maintain the national sovereignty of the new State and to promote a climate of national unity and political stability.

East Africa is facing a serious food crisis caused by phenomena that are beyond the control of men and by the political and military conflict still raging in parts of Somalia. It is incumbent upon us all to contribute without delay to finding a lasting solution to this serious situation. The Government of Sao Tome and Principe proclaims its readiness to participate in activities contributing to the alleviation of the suffering of the people of that region. We join other Members of the United Nations in appealing to the international community to provide more financial resources to support efforts to normalize the situation in the region. In the particular case of Somalia, we would appeal for an increase in official development assistance.

The United Nations is still addressing the pending question of the Western Sahara and has adopted several resolutions aimed at settling the conflict between the Kingdom of Morocco and the Frente Polisario. Sao Tome and Principe would like to see the two parties sit at the negotiating table and urges the United Nations to proceed with the population census, in accordance with its own resolutions, with a view to completing this long process of negotiation.

Democracy has the virtue of giving a voice to people so they can choose their leaders through popular, free, direct and transparent elections by secret ballots cast in voting booths. The uprisings that started in January in North Africa have expressed the sentiments and will of the people of Tunisia, Egypt and Libya to turn the page of their contemporary history. It is in this conviction that the Democratic Republic of Sao Tome and Principe recognizes the new governing authorities in these countries as legitimate representatives of their peoples.

We welcome the presence of the National Transitional Council within the United Nations, and urge the authorities of that country to conduct an inclusive process of peaceful transition to ensure peace, stability and social progress in that part of Africa. Furthermore, our country is of the view that political changes should take place not under violent circumstances, but without any pressure or political interference.

The Middle East continues to be shaken by an unprecedented wave of conflicts within the borders of some Middle Eastern countries as well as in the broader region. The people of Syria, Yemen and Bahrain have demanded reforms in State institutions. However, we see the Israeli-Palestinian conflict continue. We reaffirm our support for the Palestinian people's right to guide their destiny, and we advocate, in accordance with the relevant United Nations resolutions, for the existence of a Jewish State. We take this opportunity to appeal to the Government of the United States of America and the European Union to exert their influence to persuade the Government of the State of Israel to stop building settlements in the occupied territories.

The trade embargo imposed on Cuba decades ago is a major concern for our countries, and for Sao Tome and Principe in particular. We urge the lifting of the sanctions so that Cuba can participate on equal footing with other States in the process of building an international society that is more balanced and fair.

Global security is vital to the sustainable development of our countries. The threats emerging in the world today — particularly transnational crime, piracy, trafficking and the sale of weapons and drugs — are a real source of concern for Sao Tome and Principe, a country with extensive sea borders in the Gulf of Guinea. These phenomena are threats that cannot be ignored and require greater interaction with the Member States with which we share these extensive maritime borders. They also require our commitment to conflict prevention, management and resolution mechanisms, based on efforts to fight organized crime and with a view to ensuring our collective security.

In this connection, we highlight the fact that the 32nd meeting of the United Nations Standing Advisory Committee on Security Questions in Central Africa,

organized by the United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs through its Regional Centre for Peace and Disarmament in Africa in Lomé, was held in Sao Tome and Principe in March.

On behalf of the Government of the Democratic Republic of Sao Tome and Principe, I would like to thank Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon for his timely and correct decision to give Africa its own central Office, which we believe will contribute greatly to the promotion and development of actions to prevent, manage and resolve conflicts in the region and will assist countries of the region in coping with possible threats to their sovereignty.

The profound changes wrought in the international political scene, resulting from structural changes in the world economy, pose new challenges to countries like Sao Tome and Principe. My country, a micro-island State, advocates greater access to the various opportunities available at the international level, in particular the possibility of obtaining more official development assistance and facilities to attract foreign investment.

It is our collective responsibility to take measures to address the harmful effects of climate change and ensure the continuity of the clean development mechanism, particularly for the least developed countries. We appreciate the political willingness of Member States to further pursue the building of the necessary consensus to achieve significant and legally binding results in Durban, South Africa, at the next Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, thus guaranteeing the second commitment period of the Kyoto Protocol.

However, climate change has caused imbalances in the microclimate of our country, with drastic consequences for our domestic production, thereby threatening the food security in Sao Tome and Principe. From this perspective, and in order to combat this scourge, civil society in Sao Tome has been advocating the need to enhance the study of the causes and adverse effects of climate change in Sao Tome and Principe. To fulfil this goal, the authorities of my country would like to continue to rely on the invaluable collaboration and availability expressed thus far by the international community in general and the specialized entities of the United Nations in particular.

I cannot end this speech without addressing the situation of the two straits.

Taking into account that has Taiwan not only enormous potential, but also a population of around 23 million people, its participation in United Nations specialized agencies, as has been the case since 2009 with respect to the World Health Assembly, could make a substantial contribution to the international community. In this regard, we urge the relevant United Nations bodies to seek ways and means to ensure the participation of Taiwan in some of the mechanisms and agencies of the United Nations system, in particular the International Civil Aviation Organization and the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change.

The Democratic Republic of Sao Tome and Principe has just concluded the consolidation of its democratic process and transition of power through an election by universal suffrage, which was direct and anonymous. The President-elect took office on 3 September. Domestically, our Government is working to reduce poverty and promote economic growth and institutional reform, particularly in the area of justice, in order to strengthen the capacities of the country's democratic institutions and development.

With regard to the Millennium Development Goals set by the United Nations for 2015, the Democratic Republic of Sao Tome and Principe has made significant progress, particularly in the areas of education and health. We recognize, however, that greater efforts should be made to attain the desired objectives. In that regard, our State wishes to continue to benefit from the continued and multifaceted support of the international community.

To conclude, I would like to reiterate the readiness of the Government of the Democratic Republic of Sao Tome and Principe to participate in efforts to mobilize our collective will and our synergies in pursuit of the noble principles and objectives that underpin the creation of the United Nations.

The Acting President: I now call on His Excellency Mr. Mohamed Mouldi Kefi, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Tunisia.

Mr. Kefi (Tunisia) (*spoke in Arabic*): First, I would like to extend to Mr. Nassir Abdulaziz Al-Nasser and our brotherly country, Qatar, my sincere congratulations on his election as President of the

General Assembly at its sixty-sixth session. We are deeply confident that he will contribute actively to the success of its work. I would also like to express my gratitude and appreciation to Mr. Joseph Deiss for his laudable and tireless efforts as President at the preceding session of the Assembly.

I take this opportunity to again congratulate Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon on his reappointment to a second term. We are ready and determined to provide all possible support to ensure the success of the plan, to be announced in the coming weeks, detailing his vision of the priorities of the Organization over the next five years.

On behalf of my country, Tunisia, I would like also to welcome the sisterly Republic of South Sudan to the United Nations and wish the new State prosperity and progress and its leaders great success in their noble mission.

Allow me to pay tribute from this rostrum to the memory of the martyrs and youths of Tunisia's valid and peaceful revolution, a revolution for freedom and dignity that brought the Arab Spring to the world. This historic event infused new hope into the conscience of humankind, which yearns for justice and democracy and places the highest value on freedom and human rights.

This spontaneous revolution — which had no real political or ideological leadership and did not involve any foreign intervention — has indeed succeeded in putting an end to one of the most dictatorial regimes in our region. The revolution exposed its practices and those of similar regimes, which in their hysterical lust for power blocked all political views, stifled freedom of expression and deprived young people of their hope for a better future, self-fulfilment and effective participation in political, economic and social life.

What happened in Tunisia is but the natural outgrowth of decades of tension and frustration. At the same time, it expressed the aspirations of its people to live in dignity and freedom. It was a decisive turning point in the country's history that enabled us to regain our natural place in the community of nations and powers. It exemplified the strength of the common human values of freedom, democracy, tolerance, equal opportunities and respect for human rights, in all of their aspects.

Today, having removed all obstacles to its political, economic, social and cultural progress, Tunisia is at a turning point in its history and is on the threshold of a new stage. It yearns for the establishment of a genuine democracy, founded on strong guarantees that uphold the people's sovereignty and enable them to exercise their rights and determine their destiny in a political system that is truly pluralistic and that enjoys peaceful transition of power, in accordance with the objectives of the glorious revolution and the faithful memories of our brave martyrs.

In seeking to achieve the goals of the revolution, the provisional Tunisian Government has made every effort to preserve all mechanisms needed to restore stability and security in the country, ensure the continuity of the State and its institutions and protect the interests of all segments of society.

We have therefore created the Higher Authority for the Protection of the Revolution, Political Reform and Democratic Transition. It brings together a range of political views and orientations, as well as representatives of civil society and national organizations. It has been entrusted with drawing up a road map to ensure a successful transitional period in a consensus-based and harmonious atmosphere.

The work of the Higher Authority, along with the consultations it held with the various national parties, resulted in a balanced and integrated plan of action from the legal and practical perspectives. This strategy will map out Tunisia's political future in accordance with the aspirations of its people for a democratic, peaceful and quiet transition.

The main features of this strategy were evidenced in the interim President's decision to suspend the Tunisian Constitution, dissolve the two chambers of Parliament and establish a provisional public administration comprised of an interim President and a provisional Government. This Government, whose competence and integrity are well known, will be responsible for running national affairs until a national constituent assembly is elected. The latter will draft a new constitution and establish a legal framework for the upcoming transitional period and thereby gain credibility in the eyes of the people.

Important strides have thus been made in preparations for the national constituent assembly elections, to be held on 23 October. We will spare no

effort to enable the Tunisian people to elect their representatives in a popular, free, pluralistic, transparent and fair fashion.

We have established an independent higher national authority to monitor the various stages of the electoral process and have endowed it with the necessary legal foundations and financial support so that it can fulfil its mission independently and effectively under the best possible conditions. This highlights the fairness of our national approach and the clear vision of the political actors involved.

In that respect, it is worth recalling that for the first time in its history, Tunisia has adopted by consensus the principle of mandatory parity in its voter registries. That will enable us to maximize the potential of Tunisian society, men and women alike, and to preserve the well-deserved position held so competently by women in the fabric of Tunisian society. My colleague, the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands, made a comment in that regard a few minutes ago.

In parallel with the progress made in the political field, the provisional Government is pursuing its comprehensive reforms in all sectors and fields. Upholding human rights and protecting public freedoms are the Government's highest priorities.

Tunisia believes deeply in the universal values of solidarity, justice and international cooperation. In that respect, we urgently appeal to the entire international community, including Governments, international and regional organizations and civil society activists, to lend their support to our country's efforts to repatriate the assets stolen from the Tunisian people by the former President and all of his family members and in-laws. The Tunisian people have the right to those funds and are in urgent need of them during this critical period fraught with tremendous economic and social challenges.

Tunisia also calls on all States that have received requests for extradition of persons involved in those crimes to respond positively to those legitimate requests. That will allow Tunisian justice to hold accountable all those who committed crimes against the Tunisian people, within the framework of a fair trial that guarantees the rights of the defendant under Tunisian law and international instruments.

We thank the friendly, kindred countries that have responded favourably to those requests. We hope that all States will efficiently and swiftly respond to Tunisia's requests, pursuant to the noble principles of international cooperation and solidarity and to ensure that the values of justice, equality and fairness before the law will be respected by all.

The Government of Tunisia, with the support of national and international economic actors, has responded to the challenges generated by the delicate post-revolutionary situation, including its negative effects on our national economy. Humanitarian and economic conditions related to the crisis in sisterly Libya have further complicated the situation and hampered our Government's task. Creating jobs, reducing the unemployment rate and eliminating social and economic disparities have become major challenges of the country.

Tunisia has been endowed with many national assets that will enable us to achieve our goals. We face numerous challenges in our endeavours for a democratic transition and for economic and social development, including the economic recession, which is apparent in certain areas. Therefore our country remains in need of continuous support and assistance from the international community.

I would like to seize this opportunity to convey my special thanks to the Group of Eight and the international and regional financial institutions that did not hesitate to support Tunisia's democratic transition and economic revival processes, especially within the framework of the Deauville Partnership. I would also like to thank United Nations bodies, regional groups and friendly and sisterly countries for their precious contributions, whether in assisting the successful democratic transition or reducing the impact of the economic crisis in Tunisia and its social repercussions.

I also welcome the seminal efforts of States and organizations alike for their assistance in responding to the massive influx of hundreds of thousands refugees into Tunisia following the events that occurred in kindred Libya. Tunisia's deep integration into its regional and international surroundings is a top priority for our foreign policy, which we are keen to develop through good relations with all States and organizations, based on cooperation, mutual respect, good-neighbourliness and respect for common interests.

Tunisia considers relations with its immediate neighbours — the countries of the Arab Maghreb Union — especially important. We reiterate our call for resumed coordination among all of the Union's member States to initiate a new phase of promoting integration through the establishment of durable and joint institutions, mainly in development and the economy, for the benefit of all of the peoples of our region.

In speaking of our Maghreb region, I take the opportunity to pay tribute also to the kindred Libyan people and to reiterate the warm respect and congratulations of the Tunisian people for their victorious revolution. It represents a crucial, historic change in the region that will pave the way for the emergence of a democratic political system in Libya. Those developments will have a profound, positive impact on Tunisian-Libyan relations and on the establishment of the Arab Maghreb Union.

As an Arab, Islamic and African country, Tunisia remains proud and deeply attached to its various origins. It will continue to support the political and regional organizations and groupings of which it is a member, as well as its economic and development partnerships.

Tunisia will remain faithful to mutual action within the Arab forum and to supporting the issues of concern to the League of Arab States, including the cause of Palestine.

Tunisia reaffirms its unwavering and principled position in support for its Palestinian brothers and sisters and for their request for full recognition as a State Member of the United Nations, as expressed by the President of the Palestinian Authority, Mr. Mahmoud Abbas, before the Assembly this past Friday (see A/66/PV.19). Tunisia thus calls on the international community to support the legitimate Palestinian bid for full membership in the United Nations, as well as its territorial integrity as an independent State within legally recognized borders, with the Holy City of Jerusalem as its capital. At the same time, Tunisia strongly condemns the unjust embargo imposed by Israel on the Gaza Strip and its recent military aggression there, which resulted in many innocent victims.

While congratulating the kindred Egyptian people for their young peoples' successful revolution based on their legitimate aspirations for freedom and dignity, Tunisia expresses its hope that peace and stability will be restored in Syria and Yemen in order to meet the aspirations of their peoples for democracy, freedom and reforms. In parallel, Tunisia reaffirms its rejection of any attempt to exploit the situation in those two friendly countries. Tunisia reiterates its call to end the Israeli occupation of the Syrian Golan and the remaining occupied Lebanese territories, in accordance with international law.

As an African country, Tunisia attaches particular importance to its geographic position in the continent and to its belief in the importance of geographic integration and strengthened cooperation and solidarity with the sisterly African countries. Tunisia remains faithful to enhancing this belief while reaffirming respect for the principles and objectives of the African Union and its unwavering support for all initiatives aimed at promoting development in the continent and preserving its peace and stability and its capabilities.

Given the strategic importance of its relations with the European Union, Tunisia will further enhance those relations with an eye to establishing a closely knit partnership based on mutual respect and common interests. Here, Tunisia expresses its hope that the European Union and all of the friendly European countries will be among the first to support the Tunisian people and to assist them in the successful implementation of their transitional phase in the political, financial and economical sectors.

Tunisia will also strengthen cooperation in its relations with the countries and the peoples of the Mediterranean under the Union for the Mediterranean.

Our country attaches a particular importance also to fostering its relations with Australia, Latin American and the Asian countries, as well as with their major regional groups, within the framework of an open and balanced foreign policy approach aimed at establishing a multifaceted partnership.

Tunisia will strive to re-establish its position within the United Nations in a way that reflects its peoples' awareness and aspirations as well as its rich history and positive contributions in its international relations. In that context, we highlight our commitment to the principles of international law and international legitimacy and call for launching the process of reforming the United Nations, mainly through enlargement of the Security Council's membership in

order to ensure permanent representation of the African continent.

Tunisia's provisional Government welcomed the convening by the General Assembly, in July 2011, of the High-level Meeting on Youth and its outcome document (resolution 65/312), which contains important recommendations reflecting the aspirations of young people throughout the world and based on the awareness that unemployment had become a universal phenomenon and thus one of the major challenges. We reiterate our call to all concerned parties to develop a global strategy to fight unemployment.

While organizing the elections to the National Constituent Assembly next October is a priority for our country, we reiterate our adherence to regional and international commitments and responsibilities. We reaffirm our work, as a peace-loving country, for international legality and to uphold the principles and values of the United Nations. We are determined to play an active and vital role in international relations, in line with the aspirations of our people, who have conducted a peaceful revolution to recover their rights, freedom and dignity.

The Acting President: I now call on His Excellency Mr. R.M. Marty M. Natalegawa, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia.

Mr. Natalegawa (Indonesia): Allow me, Sir, to congratulate His Excellency Mr. Nassir Abdulaziz Al-Nasser on his election to preside over the Assembly at the sixty-sixth session. Let me also commend his predecessor, His Excellency Mr. Joseph Deiss, for his leadership in guiding us over the Assembly's sixth-fifth session. May I take this opportunity to congratulate Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon on his reappointment.

Indonesia would also like to welcome South Sudan as a Member of the United Nations.

Our world continues to be full of challenges, political and military tensions and conflicts, as well as threats of nuclear weapons and of acts of piracy and terrorism. There is the financial and economic crisis. Worse and more fundamental still, in many corners of the world there is abject poverty and hunger, environmental threats and natural disasters, energy and food insecurity, intolerance and discrimination. There are authoritarian regimes bent on suppressing the clamour for democracy and respect for human rights.

We believe that in convening in this historic Hall, as we do every year, we must seek more than simply to review the past year, to lament opportunities lost and to congratulate ourselves on the gains made. Rather, we must ensure that, moving forward, as nations we stand united — United Nations — in addressing and anticipating the challenges ahead.

In particular, we must stand united in transforming challenges into opportunities for nations to forge mutually beneficial partnerships, anchored in the principles of the United Nations Charter. We must change challenges into opportunities to promote a new kind of international relations that accentuates partnership rather than confrontation, and that places primacy on the building of bridges rather than the deepening of fault lines and divisions, and on nations aggressively waging peace and development.

Waging peace and development in the Middle East must, first and foremost, entail correcting the historic injustice to the Palestinian people that has been allowed for too long. Indonesia's support for the legitimate aspirations and rights of the people of Palestine to live in freedom, peace, justice and dignity in their own homeland has been steadfast and will continue unabated.

Indonesia therefore strongly supports Palestine's present quest for full membership in the United Nations. Such membership is consistent with the vision of the two-State solution and of a just and comprehensive peace in the Middle East. Indeed, the recent heightened worldwide focus on the issue of Palestine can, and must, be channelled in a constructive way towards the promotion of an inclusive partnership among nations that leads to the fulfilment of the historic responsibilities shouldered by our United Nations.

The continued denial of the most basic rights of the Palestinian people becomes all the more glaring in the face of the welcome democratic transformation that is under way in parts of North Africa and the Middle East. Like many, Indonesia has been deeply concerned by the untold losses and casualties suffered by innocent civilians. The bloodshed and use of force must be brought to an immediate end, for, ultimately, political solutions must be found. That means that conditions conducive for people to shape their own future must be promoted. Thus in Libya, for example, Indonesia

supports the National Transitional Council in its efforts to promote a peaceful and democratic transition.

A decade or so ago now, Indonesia too went through a tumultuous process of democratic change. Today, as the third largest democracy, Indonesia is reaping the democratic dividends of such change. That is why we believe that political development and democratization should constitute a priority item on our agenda, to allow States to share lessons learned and experiences in their unique paths towards democratization. That is why we took the initiative of launching the Bali Democracy Forum — the only intergovernmental forum for the sharing of experience and cooperation on political development in Asia. It is a forum for partnership in the promotion of democracy.

Global partnership is particularly key in addressing the challenges of development in order to achieve the Millennium Development Goals and to prevent the recurrence of famine, which we are currently witnessing in the Horn of Africa. Thus we must act in concert and in a focused and sustainable way to ensure food security for the most vulnerable. That means increased investment in the agricultural research and development sector and increased production and productivity.

I wish to highlight one particular driver of economic growth and development. An enhanced role for women in the economy is not only right, but also smart, leading to both increased growth and more balanced, sustainable and equitable growth.

Achieving food security also requires that we confront the reality of climate change. The international community must find the political commitment to generate momentum for climate change, towards a new climate regime after 2012. The forthcoming seventeenth Conference of the Parties to the Climate Change Convention in Durban and the Rio+20 Conference on Sustainable Development in Brazil next year must deliver.

However, let us not wait. In Indonesia, we are committed to being proactive and to being part of the global solution to climate change. Through the REDD-plus programme — Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation — we are using our natural rainforests as an important part of our mitigation efforts.

Our commitment to work in partnership in addressing climate change must not founder before the looming and renewed threat of the global financial and economic crisis. In the face of that challenge, we must take bold measures. The reform of international financial and economic governance must be expedited. Enhanced coordination of national economic policies is essential. We must learn to step out of our comfort zone and address those critical needs in concert. As emerging economies are now an important engine of global economic growth, they must have a greater opportunity to contribute to promoting solutions.

The challenges confronting us are persistent and formidable, but we have the opportunity and the capacity to address them and, most of all, to turn challenges into opportunities. For a start, since those challenges defy national solutions, they can at the same time motivate countries to strike partnerships and build cooperation. In that regard, allow me to highlight two basic points.

First, we need to strengthen multilateralism in order to address global challenges. That means the central role of the United Nations. To be able to address new and emerging challenges, and, not least, to identify new opportunities, full support for and reform of the United Nations are key. That is the only way that the United Nations can remain relevant and to ensure that multilateralism flourishes.

Through reform, we must ensure that the United Nations and its decision-making processes are more effective, efficient, transparent and inclusive. We must persevere in strengthening the General Assembly, the Economic and Social Council and their subsidiary organs, as well as the Human Rights Council. We must support the Peacebuilding Commission as it helps countries emerging from conflict.

The Security Council must better reflect the current world situation. It should become more representative, more transparent and, thus, more effective. All key issues of United Nations reform should be addressed as integral parts of a comprehensive package.

Secondly, cooperation and partnership between the United Nations and regional organizations are key to addressing today's global challenges. Thus, there should be synergy between global and regional efforts. That is particularly true in conflict prevention and resolution, linked to the theme of this year's General

Assembly session, "The role of mediation in the settlement of disputes by peaceful means".

In South-East Asia, as Chair of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), Indonesia has worked ceaselessly to develop the region's capacity to prevent and to manage potential conflicts, and to resolve them. Our efforts have been focused not only on the further development of ASEAN's conflict prevention and resolution mechanisms, but also on developing and nurturing the necessary comfort level among ASEAN member States to resort to such mechanisms.

As a result, we expect South-East Asia to remain a net contributor to international peace and security, as well as to economic development and prosperity. Beyond its own subregion, anchored in a strong ASEAN Community, we are indeed set to attain those achievements by 2015. ASEAN continues to be the driving force in promoting a regional architecture throughout Asia-Pacific that is conducive to the maintenance of regional peace and stability, which is precisely the kind of conditions that have enabled countries in the region to pursue a development path uninterrupted by wars and conflicts.

In the current regional setting, in Indonesia we describe that as conditions that are marked by a dynamic equilibrium, where dominant power is absent owing to a lack of the promotion of block politics and often self-fulfilling geopolitical fault lines. Rather, there exists a new kind of international relations, with its emphasis on common security, common prosperity and common stability.

This November, a revamped East Asia Summit will convene in Bali, Indonesia, with the participation of the Russian Federation and the United States for the first time. That will be part of an important regional architecture.

As ASEAN builds its Community and continues its central role in maintaining a stable and peaceful environment in the Asia-Pacific region, it sets a new challenge and a new vision for itself, that is, to develop greater cohesion and a common platform on global issues — an ASEAN that is a net contributor to the solution of many of the world's ills and challenges. That is in keeping with ASEAN's theme for 2011, "ASEAN Community in a Global Community of Nations".

To conclude, I wish to assure Members of the United Nations that Indonesia will be relentless and unceasing in promoting the ideals embodied in the Charter of the United Nations in promoting peace.

The Acting President: I now call on His Excellency Mr. John Baird, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Canada.

Mr. Baird (Canada): Nearly 66 years ago, in 1946, one of my predecessors was privileged to represent Canada at the first session of the General Assembly. It is an honour to follow in those footsteps and to renew Canada's commitment to the founding principles of the United Nations, namely, to maintain international peace and security; to prevent and remove threats to peace; to suppress acts of aggression; to respect the principle of equal rights and the self-determination of peoples; to strengthen universal peace; and to promote and encourage respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms for all. This Hall symbolizes the promise of humankind and what we can accomplish by working together to uphold those founding principles.

Yet, only a short distance from here is an entirely different symbol — ground zero. The date 9/11 was a stark reminder that evil exists, that life is fragile, that freedom has enemies, and that the poison of radical terrorism is all too real. It serves as a reminder that, as far as humankind has advanced, threats to peace, security and human dignity remain.

In that context, I wish to share reflections on three areas: first, the principles that motivate Canada's approach to foreign policy; secondly, the basis for Canada's support of multilateral organizations and multilateral action; and thirdly, a way forward for the United Nations.

The founding principles of these United Nations are more than mere words. It is our duty to pull them from the printed page, to breathe life into them and to practise them every day. In everyday practice, it is not easy to uphold principles. It requires struggle and sacrifice. Some pay the ultimate price.

The world remembers Secretary-General Dag Hammarskjöld, who was killed 50 years ago this month. We honour him for his integrity, his principles and for his great courage in confronting power. We also remember that it was Canada's Prime Minister, John Diefenbaker, who, just a year earlier, stood at this very

rostrum to respond to unjust attacks against him. Canada did not hesitate to defend the Office and the person of the Secretary-General.

That is the Canadian tradition — standing for what is principled and just, regardless of whether it is popular, convenient or expedient. Over the past century, the world was infected by a lethal combination of utopian ideology and brutal despotism that spawned totalitarian regimes that enslaved their own peoples. Apologists tried to persuade us that the ideology of Communism was benign. Canadians knew better. We took a stand for freedom and fundamental human rights. We stood against oppression in Germany and in Ukraine. We stood with its brave people, and those of the other captive nations of central and Eastern Europe.

Canada does not go along in order to get along. We will go along only if we go in a direction that advances Canada's values: freedom, democracy, human rights and the rule of law. Also, Canada would not go along to support the farce of a major proliferator of nuclear arms presiding over the Conference on Disarmament. When North Korea relinquished the presidency, we resumed our engagement in the Conference. Canada's tough economic sanctions against that rogue regime remain in place, and we continue to advocate and advance reform in how the President of that important body is selected.

We would not go along with appeasement of the former Al-Qadhafi regime, nor would we look the other way when the Lockerbie mass murderer received a hero's welcome and the Colonel's embrace. We would not look the other way as the Al-Qadhafi regime, blatantly disregarding human rights and the rule of law, waged war on the people of Libya.

Canada backs our principles with action: providing military support to NATO's Operation Unified Protector; recognizing the National Transitional Council as Libya's transitional Government; co-founding the Libya Contact Group; and giving early, strong and continuing support to the Libyan people's struggle against tyranny.

Canada would not simply go along or look elsewhere when the Al-Assad regime started killing Syrian men, women and children in a despicable and desperate attempt to cling to power. We imposed tough sanctions on the regime and its backers.

Canada will not go along with a double standard that castigates some United Nations Members for alleged failings, while ignoring the notorious abuses of others. We supported the aspirations of those peoples who sought brighter futures for themselves and their countries during the Arab spring that has just passed.

However, we will not go along with the unilateral actions of the Palestinian Authority. Just a few days ago, the Quartet laid the foundation for a return to negotiation. Our Government's position has been clear — the only solution to the issue is one that is negotiated by the two parties themselves. We continue to encourage both sides to accept those principles and to return to direct talks, based on a two-State solution, without delay or precondition.

We uphold Israel's right to exist. We uphold its fundamental right, like any Member State, to defend innocent civilians against acts of terrorism. Just as Fascism and Communism were the great struggles of previous generations, terrorism is the great struggle of ours. Far too often, the Jewish State is on the front line in our struggle and its people are the victims of terror.

Canada will not accept or stay silent while the Jewish State is attacked for defending its territory and its citizens. The Second World War taught us all the tragic price of going along just to get along. It was accommodation and appeasement that allowed Fascism to gather strength. As Winston Churchill said, an appeaser is one who feeds a crocodile, hoping it will eat him last.

We respect State sovereignty, but Canada will not go along or look the other way when a minority is denied its human rights or fundamental freedoms. It is our common duty to uphold the rights of the afflicted and to give a voice to the voiceless.

As citizens of the global community, we have a solemn duty to defend the vulnerable, to challenge aggression and to protect and promote human rights and human dignity, at home and abroad: women, Christians, Baha'i and other victims of persecution in Iran; Roman Catholic priests, other Christian clergy and their laity, driven to worship underground in China; Christians being driven out of Iraq by Al-Qaida; and Copts being assaulted and killed in Egypt. In Burma, the regime discriminates against several forms of Buddhism and restricts the activities of Muslims. In other places, the Ahmadiyya community faces real violence. Gays and lesbians are threatened with the

criminalization of their sexuality in Uganda, and other minorities are subjected to persecution, oppression or violence. Our nationalities are many but we share one humanity.

I am pleased to report that Canada will be creating an office of religious freedom within our Government at the heart of my own Department. The office will promote freedom of religion and of conscience as key objectives of Canadian foreign policy. The long history of humankind has proved that religious freedom and democratic freedom are inseparable. As Franklin Roosevelt observed on the eve of global war,

> "[w]here freedom of religion has been attacked, the attack has come from sources opposed to democracy. Where democracy has been overthrown, the spirit of free worship has disappeared. And where religion and democracy have vanished, good faith and reason in international affairs have given way to strident ambition and brute force".

That brings me to Canada's support of multilateral institutions and multilateral action. Some years ago, a former Secretary-General referred to enlightened multilateralism as the guarantor, not the enemy, of State sovereignty and the integrity of State. State sovereignty is not created by multilateral institutions. Instead, multilateral institutions exist and derive legitimacy from the independent decisions of sovereign States.

Canada's position in that regard was explained by our Prime Minister just last year. Referring to multilateral action to address the world economic crisis, Stephen Harper said that he saw world leadership, at its best, as a glimpse of a hopeful future where we act together for the good of all; the world we have been trying to build since 1945; the world we want for our children and for our grandchildren. It can be done if we act together.

Enlightened sovereignty, multilateral institutions and multilateral action result from a collection of sovereign decisions based on individual States' own interests, not narrow self-interest in sovereignty's name, but an expanded view of mutual interest in which there is room for all to grow and for all to prosper. Canada calls that enlightened sovereignty. It is the natural extension of enlightened self-interest.

As Canada's Prime Minister noted when he addressed the General Assembly last year, the United Nations Charter is animated by "the idea that what is good for others may well be the best way to pursue one's own interests" (*A/65/PV.11, p. 46*) — in other words, enlightened sovereignty.

The world knows that we can accomplish great things by working together. This year, collective action under United Nations sanction helped to limit the loss of life in Libya and ultimately ended a criminal, illegitimate regime's war on the people whom it claimed to represent. Canada was tremendously proud to take part in its demise. Our Royal Canadian Air Force flew 10 per cent of the total strike sorties against Al-Qadhafi's forces and our Royal Canadian Navy helped enforce the maritime blockade.

Canada has paid heavily, both in dollar terms and in a costly human toll, to fulfil our United Nations obligation to support the lawful Government of Afghanistan. We used our chairmanship of the Group of Eight to reach out to leaders from Africa and the Americas and to secure an agreement to enact the Muskoka Initiative for maternal, newborn and child health.

That progress will help to meet the Millennium Development Goal of reducing the appalling mortality among mothers and children in developing countries. Working with like-minded nations, Canada continues to make significant financial contributions towards peace, humanitarian assistance, development aid and security in the Sudans. Collective action does not mean uniformity.

For example, Canada works closely with like-minded countries to advance human rights and democracy in Burma. At the same time, we imposed the toughest sanctions in the world against that country's repressive military regime. Similarly, when Canada placed strong restrictions on Syria's current regime, we acted independently, but in close consultation and cooperation with other nations.

In the defence of freedom and human rights, form cannot prevail over substance. The determinant is which route produces the best results. While multilateral action should be preferred, failure to achieve consensus must not prevent the willing from acting to uphold human rights and the founding principles of the United Nations.

Margaret Thatcher was once reported to have said that "consensus seems to be the process of abandoning all beliefs, principles, values and policies. So it is something in which no one believes". That leads to my third topic — the challenges to the relevance and the effectiveness of this important Organization.

Canada has been a consistently reliable and responsible participant in United Nations initiatives around the world. We are the seventh largest contributor to United Nations finances. The citizens of the world deserve that the United Nations abide by the same principles observed by so many Governments of Member States: accountability, transparency and ethics; financial responsibility and fiscal austerity; efficiency and the elimination of waste and duplication; regular reviews to sunset unnecessary, redundant and obsolete mandates; and zero tolerance for conflicts of interest, fraud and corruption.

Yet, the challenges faced by this Organization extend beyond financial probity and operational effectiveness. This Organization is a forum for debate and dialogue, but it must also be a force for positive action to make the world a better place. As a former Canadian Prime Minister, John Diefenbaker, told this Assembly during his defence of the world's persecuted minorities: "We are not here in this Assembly to win wars of propaganda. We are here to win victories for peace." (*A/PV.871, para. 225*)

The relevance and effectiveness of the United Nations are imperilled when the founding principles are observed in word but not in deed. Such is the case when the presidency of the Conference on Disarmament passes to a regime involved in the illicit transfers of weapons, material and technology; or when Iran, which mocks the values of this Organization through such outrages as refusing to allow entry to United Nations observers on human rights, is permitted to seek leadership roles, such as the vice-presidency of the General Assembly and a seat on the Commission on Population and Development; or when objection is taken on petty, procedural or process-based grounds to reporting that speaks about credible allegations of war crimes committed in Sri Lanka; or when blatant violators of women's rights are welcomed to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, often despite reservations that are incompatible with the object and purpose of the very Convention.

Canada has consistently opposed the debasement of multilateral institutions by conduct that is inconsistent with their values. For example, this year marks the fiftieth anniversary of Canada's principled refusal to support membership in the Commonwealth of Nations by South Africa's then apartheid regime.

The greatest enemies of the United Nations are not those who publicly repudiate its actions. The greatest enemies of the United Nations are those who quietly undermine its principles or, even worse, who sit idly, watching its slow decline. We cannot sit idly.

Canada is a vigorous defender of freedom, democracy and the rule of law. As our Prime Minister remarked earlier this month,

> "we are not a country that makes war for gain or for territory. We do not fight for glory. If we covet honour, it is only a reputation for doing the right thing in a good cause".

That is all. That is enough. If I may be so bold, that is why the countries of the world came together in the United Nations — to do the right thing in a good cause. The cause is peace, justice, freedom and opportunity for all.

The meeting rose at 6.35 p.m.